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MAGAZINE
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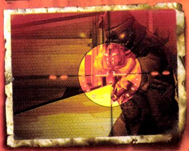

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Blood
Violence
Strong Language

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PlayStation 2

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NOV 2004 | 157

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The Urbz
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PlayStation 2

XBOX

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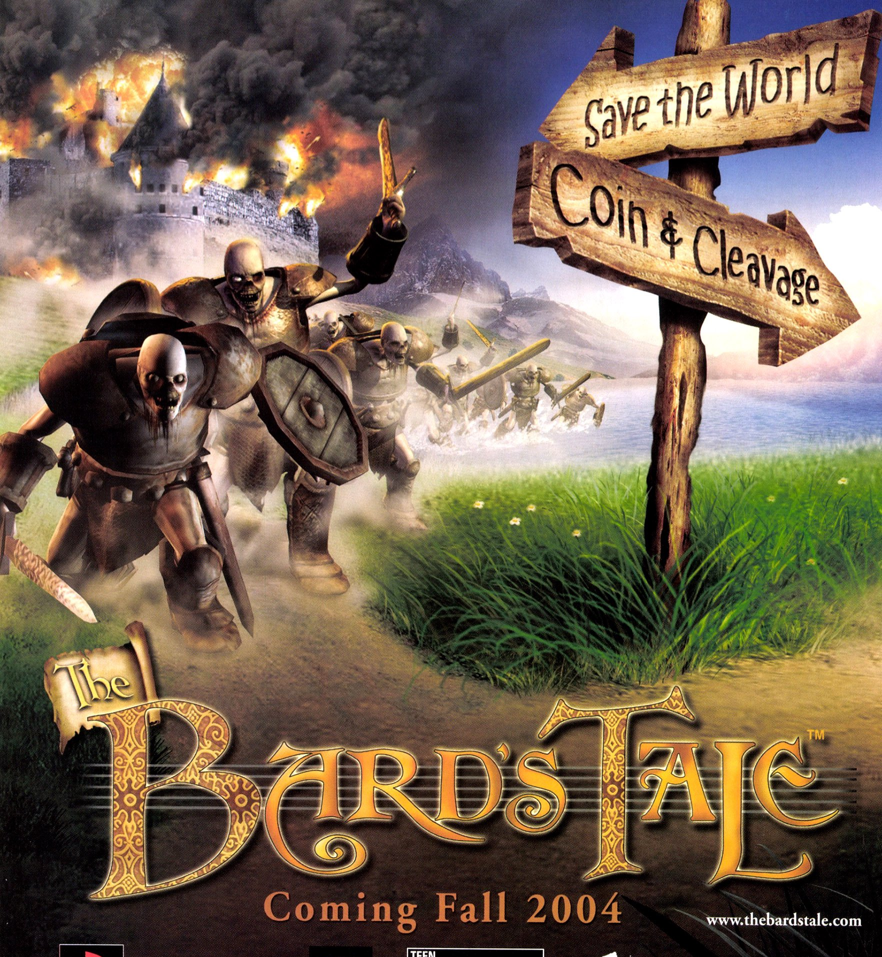

Coming Fall 2004

www.thebardstale.com

PlayStation PlayStation®2 XBOX

TEEN
T
Blood
Language
Suggestive Themes
Use of Alcohol
Violence
ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

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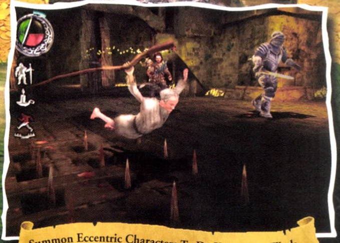
"…Right Now, There Is No Other Game In The Genre That Looks Remotely As Good."
– *PSM*

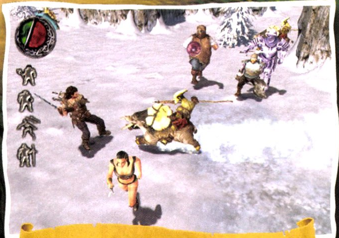
"…It Has Skyrocketed To The Top Of My Most-Wanted Games List."
– *Gamespy*

"…The Bard's Tale made us bust up. Not just once or twice, but seemingly in every other scene."
– *Official PlayStation Magazine*

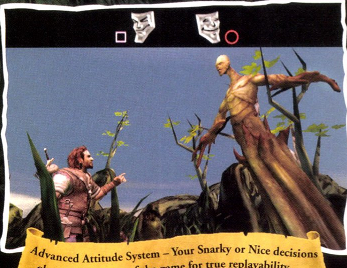
"…more humor than the entire Xbox library combined…"
Pick of the Month – October 2004
- *Official Xbox Magazine*



Summon Eccentric Characters To Do Your Dirty Work, Like This Poor Old Bastard Who Finds Traps…the Hard Way.



Less A, More I – Don't Underestimate Your Crafty Opponents.



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TEEN
T
Mild Language
Violence
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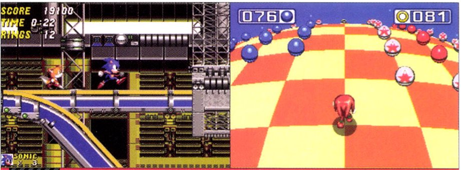
XBOX

PANDEMIC

PlayStation 2

LUCAS Arts



SONIC MEGA COLLECTION

ALL THE SONIC YOU CAN HANDLE

Back in the days when no one thought an unassuming plumber could be removed from his throne, along came a blue hedgehog by the name of Sonic. Not only did he provide Sega with its first real mascot, but Sonic made Sega one of the biggest players in the industry. This collection almost perfectly illustrates why Sonic achieved what he did.

Nearly all of the Genesis incarnations of Sonic's adventures hold up surprisingly well. Each serves as a shining example of what happens when you mix short attention spans with excellent level design. Unfortunately, this recipe grew tiresome after a while, and so Sega tried to adapt by adding more furries and making the gameplay a little more dynamic, but something was lost in the process—as evidenced by *Sonic & Knuckles* and the horrible *Sonic 3D Blast*.

As for the rest of the games in the collection (the non-Genesis games), don't bother. The poor Game Gear hardware just didn't have enough power to do adequate Genesis ports, so instead, Sega gave us the garbage known as *Sonic Labyrinth* and *Sonic Drift*. Fans may appreciate that Sega included these games for the sake of history, though most will probably be disappointed by the no-show of *Sonic CD*, which is widely regarded as one of the best in the series.

Oddly enough, *Comix Zone* and *Ristar* are also part of the package; while they aren't *Sonic* games, they definitely represent finer moments of the Genesis, making the package worthwhile for hardcore fans. « *Giancarlo Varanini*

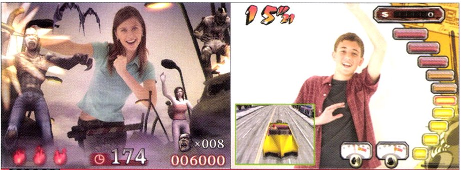
VERDICT A must-have for big fans of Sonic the Hedgehog.

Pub. Sega **Dev.** Sega **ESRB** E **MSRP** $19.99

RATING [●●●○○]

TRIVIA FUN

Did you know that Sonic the Hedgehog was originally voiced by none other than Jaleel "Steve Urkel" White in the original *Sonic* cartoon?



SEGA SUPERSTARS

DOING EYETOY PROUD

Now *this* is how you do licensed material EyeToy style: Take a healthy selection of popular franchises, think long and hard about the best way for the player to control them without actually touching anything, and throw them into a broad, varied, and affordable package.

While some games work better than others, most are surprisingly interesting and fun. Take Virtua Fighter, for example: At first glance it may appear to be nothing more than a repurposing of the boxing game on EyeToy's *Play* disc, but in actuality, it's a lot more satisfying. By presenting targets to aim for (and introducing a block mechanic), the game feels much more focused.

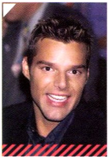
There are a couple other games that are only slight modifications of *Play* titles, like House of the Dead (see Kung Foo) or Virtua Striker (Keep Ups), but these tend to be improvements on the original. Even better are the completely novel ideas, like the fantastic flying interface in NiGHTS or the tilt-and-roll system for Super Monkey Ball. And then, of course, there are the no-brainers, like the rhythm-based Samba de Amigo and Space Channel 5. In fact, there's only one true dud in the whole bunch: Crazy Taxi.

Beyond that, the games range from the simple and diverting to the fascinating and surprisingly complex. The addition of the Chao Garden—in which you hatch, feed, and entertain a Chao—makes the whole game substantially deeper than any EyeToy title I've seen so far. Granted, that isn't hard to do, but it's still a very pleasant surprise. « *Joe Rybicki*

PROS Surprising depth for an EyeToy game
CONS Long loads, lots of camera repositioning

Pub. Sega **Dev.** Sega **ESRB** T **MSRP** $29.99

RATING [●●●●○]



SHAKE, SHAKE, SHAKE

Sega Superstars' version of Samba de Amigo features licensed tracks "Livin' la Vida Loca," "La Bamba," "Gonna Fly Now," and "Hot Hot Hot."

APE ESCAPE

NOT AS NAUGHTY AS IT SOUNDS

Ape Escape: Primed & Pumped is a prototypical party game—those who'll enjoy it most are probably either under the age of 8 or are enjoying herbal refreshments. The learning curve isn't much of an issue, and repetition is the order of the day. Battle your way through a tournament alone or with up to four players in deathmatches, coin collection, races...and that about sums it up. The arenas change—you're on foot, you're in a boat, you're flying—but the battles themselves are pretty stagnant. Gadgets at your disposal range from stun clubs to slingshots to remote-controlled cars, and can be used in combos that deliver some devastating moves, but the available combos per character is limited to about seven. You primarily control attacks by spinning your right analog stick. If you're less than sober or very small, this makes the game quite accessible. If you're neither of these, it can bring on carpal tunnel syndrome.

So what's the hook? Monkeys. Lots of them. Pipo Monkey is playable for the first time in an *Ape Escape* game. Or, play as Team Monkey, which offers, according to the manual, "five Pipo monkeys in different colored pants!" Or check out Pipotron, the "mysterious" monkey team who, in my opinion, are either robots that look like monkeys or monkeys possessed by Satan.

If you create a custom character in story mode, "good things may happen!" (says the manual); perform well and you'll get a Monkey Fan Club, which will support you with gifts and...fan mail! Yes, like little simian Shakespeares, members of your Monkey Fan Club will send you letters of praise.

Ultimately, though, even "five Pipo monkeys in different colored pants!" aren't enough to make the same repeated games and gadgets interesting—unless you're a 7-year-old or a stoner. But that is, like many party games, probably who this game is for anyway, and if so, it succeeds. The rest of you will want pass on yet another repetitive party game. « *Kristen Salvatore*

VERDICT Monkeys wearing pants are good for a laugh—but only briefly.

Pub. Ubisoft **Dev.** Sony CEA **ESRB** E **MSRP** $39.99

RATING [●●◐○○]

LOTR: THE THIRD AGE

BORED OF THE RINGS

Most console RPGs, whether a *Final Fantasy* title or a *Suikoden,* attempt to meld storytelling and combat, so it makes sense for EA to want to staple the proven *Final Fantasy* formula to the grandiose *Lord of the Rings* storytelling that's lasted some 50-odd years. Unfortunately, what results is a repetitive bore of a game taped onto a movie that everyone's already seen.

The Lord of the Rings: The Third Age's battle system is essentially *FFX* with a tengwar (elvish) font. Three-member parties, swapping said party members, and turns and their effect on timing all seem reverse-engineered from Squenix's formula. Heck, there are even victory dances—I almost expected *FF*'s trumpet to blare in triumph after my first battle.

While the battle system is solid, the battles themselves are dreadfully boring. Due to the movie license, the enemies can only be in-movie critters. Which means you literally spend five hours in a row fighting the same damn uruk-hai/warg/goblin/fell beast group over and over and over and over and over again. Helm's Deep is usually the breaking point for most players, as it plants you in one place and forces you to go through a crazy amount of battles with respawning uruk-hai. Apparently, *TTA* doesn't really use traditional boss battles, it just liberally uses the copy-and-paste command. To top it off, the random-battle frequency seems to want to challenge *Skies of Arcadia* in the "Most Battles per Square Inch" arena, as one can literally walk two steps and land in a battle. More infuriating, I was the victim of an instance where I put the controller down, typed up this paragraph, and noticed that a battle was triggered, despite me standing still onscreen for the previous minute.

In between the craptacular combat are the snazzy-looking exploration and the boring menu screens. Combat is so frequent that you basically level up every two battles and equip random items in your inventory. If you're not fighting yet another warg, you're once again juggling numbers around on a character sheet. Since the characters are clones based on Fellowship members, you end up not even caring about your characters and their stats.

The integration with the films is simply bizarre. While it's occasionally clever and sensible (being on the receiving end of Pippin's accident in Balin's Tomb), the rest is shoehorned inanity. Most of the "story" has you trailing the Fellowship and basically experiencing their leftovers. More egregious is how the much-vaunted Balrog fight, while visually spectacular, stretches credibility. According to *TTA*, in the 10 seconds it takes between Gandalf proclaiming "You shall not pass!" and the Balrog falling into the Shadow, four random people came by and helped Gandalf take it down. Uh, right. Not to mention the oddly reedited dialogue (characters will "talk" with you, except with dialogue that was lifted from a different scene in a wholly different context) or the "reward" of watching scenes from the movies but with new voiceovers by Ian McKellen.

One cannot deny the visual work poured into this game (the effects are spectacular, and it's neat to see your equipped items actually appear in cutscenes), but that's about it. When you're essentially playing the stunt doubles of the nonhobbit members of the Fellowship in order to see redubbed movie clips, you might as well cut out the middleman and just watch the movies all over again instead. « *Thierry Nguyen*

MY PRECIOUS It looks pretty
STINKING HOBBITSES Story and combat

Pub. EA Games **Dev.** EA Redwood Shores **ESRB** T **MSRP** $49.99

RATING [●●○○○]

MORE BAD

There is also the evil mode, which feels like an afterthought. Basically, after finishing a chapter, you can then play "key" battles as the bad guys. Yes, you can finally play as a giant warg! Finishing the chapters in evil mode nets you near-useless items most of the time, and occasionally a marginally cool weapon or two.

NCAA MARCH MADNESS 2005 VS. ESPN COLLEGE HOOPS 2K5

HOOPIN' ON UP!

OFFENSE

The best thing about *College Hoops*' offensive game this year is that it actually feels a little more like a college game—this version does a better job of re-creating the hectic nature of college basketball than its predecessor. Also, the new passing option that lets receivers catch a pass in stride while cutting to the basket is very helpful and makes for some genuinely exciting play options. However, *College Hoops*' controls are still pretty stiff since many of the IsoMotion moves require you to wait through a relatively lengthy animation before you can take control of the ball handler. There's still some way to go before *College Hoops* feels like a real college basketball game, but this is a step in the right direction.

Conversely, if you played last year's version of *March Madness*, you can expect more of the same. As always, the freestyle control is helpful in slicing up the defense to create some open shots, but the biggest new feature in *March Madness* is the floor general play-calling system. This allows you to call slightly more complicated plays out on the court, and while it adds some strategy to your offensive game, it's somewhat superfluous since the basic plays take less time to set up and can often be equally effective.

Winner: *NCAA March Madness 2005*

DEFENSE

This is where *College Hoops* can't match *March Madness*. Again, the development team for this year's *College Hoops* has done a better job of making sure that the ball handler feels the pressure of a trap or a wacky zone defense, but you never really have to fight too hard to break through. To the game's credit, defenses do a better job of intercepting errant passes, but it's still a little too easy to wildly fling the ball around the court or even throw a sharp pass through two or three defenders to a man cutting to the basket.

The defensive game in *March Madness 2005* is excellent, but at the same time, it's essentially the same as it was last year. Defenders run great half-court traps and presses, and consistently do a good job of playing tough zones and performing switches when a man is out of position. The floor general system also works on defense, but it's not all that different from calling standard defensive sets.

Winner: *NCAA March Madness 2005*

DYNASTY/LEGACY MODES

The differences between the main modes in both games largely come down to interface design. *College Hoops*' legacy mode is much more elegant and interesting. When you explore the individual options that the legacy mode has to offer, you'll actually want to use them because everything is so nicely laid out and easy to navigate. Plus, there is just a ton of stuff to mess around with, ranging from different coaching styles to ESPN.com-style rankings and updates.

Don't get me wrong, *March Madness*' dynasty mode has plenty to offer too, and in some cases, it goes into even more depth than *College Hoops*' legacy mode. In fact, it goes so deep that you have to be watchful of how you discipline players, because if they get out of control or if your school violates too many NCAA regulations, then you can be voted out of your original conference. Still, the navigation isn't quite as good as it is in *College Hoops*, even with the PDA device ripped from *NBA Live* that gives you updates on various aspects of your team.

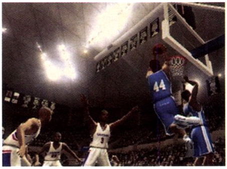
Winner: *ESPN College Hoops 2K5*

ESPN COLLEGE HOOPS 2K5

PROS Better college feel, great online and legacy modes, cheap
CONS Controls need tweaking, still has a bit of a pro feel

Pub. ESPN Videogames **Dev.** Visual Concepts **ESRB** E **MSRP** $19.99

RATING [●●●◐○]



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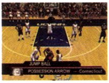


ONLINE

For the online play, it basically comes down to this—*College Hoops 2K5* has all the features that *March Madness 2005* has and more. In addition to tournaments, messaging services, and stat tracking, there are leagues where you can play seasons with anyone around the country. Of course, much boils down to which game plays better online, and for that, *March Madness* definitely earns some kudos. But *College Hoops* wins it here for variety of features.

Winner: *ESPN College Hoops 2K5*

EXTRAS

The games' extra features are pretty similar. There are a bunch of collectible items and goodies to unlock by playing through the game. *College Hoops* has create-a-player and create-a-college options, as well as a coaching mode that lets you sit on the sideline and call plays while the action happens out on the court. But its best extra feature is undoubtedly the air hockey table. *March Madness* offers classic teams, clothing, and a new college classic mode where you can relive some of college basketball's most famous moments—it's just too bad that there are so few moments like that in the game.

Winner: Tie

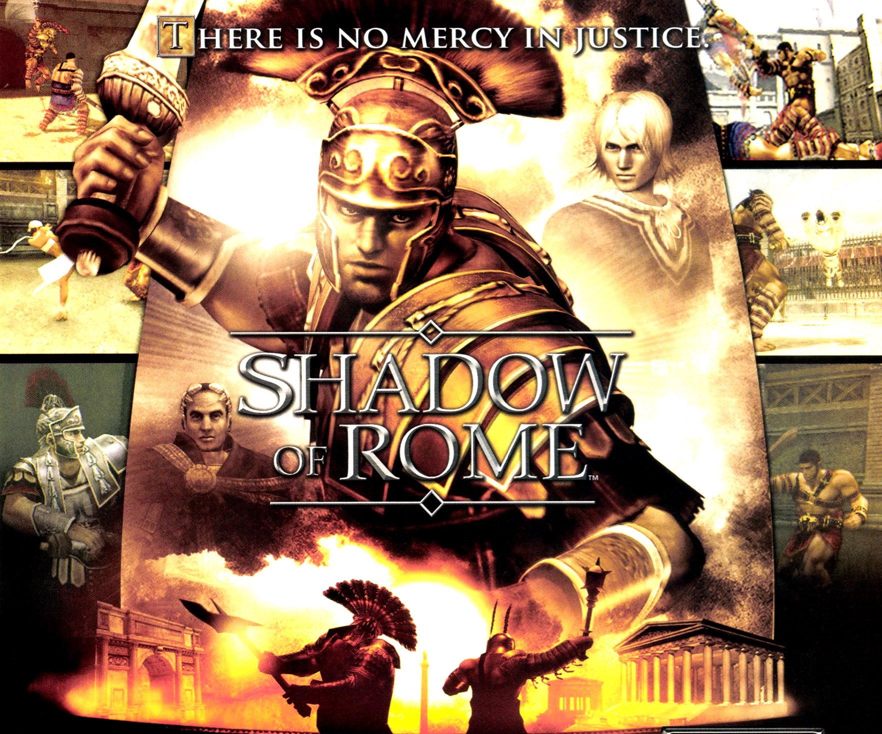
« Giancarlo Varanini

NCAA MARCH MADNESS 2005

PROS Great representation of college basketball, responsive controls
CONS Kinda like last year, floor general mode is nice but not a big deal

Pub. EA Sports **Dev.** EA Sports **ESRB** E **MSRP** $39.99

RATING [●●●◐○]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SHADOW OF ROME™

44 B.C. ROMAN EMPIRE

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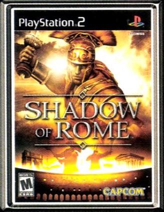
FAST PACED CHARIOT RACES AND BATTLES

CHARACTER SWITCHING FOR INFO GATHERING AND PUZZLE SOLVING MISSIONS



MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Blood and Gore
Intense Violence

CAPCOM

PlayStation 2

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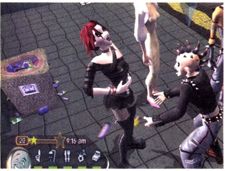

PURE POP
Think the game's music sounds familiar? That's because the Black-Eyed Peas went back to the studio to rerecord nine of their songs in Simlish for ***The Urbz***. Band members also provided voices for game characters.

THE URBZ: SIMS IN THE CITY

MORE FLAVA THAN GAME

Say good-bye to the burbs—the Sims have finally moved to that deluxe apartment in the sky.

So what's better about city living? Needs are more streamlined than in previous games, with only five items to keep an eye on, which makes it easier to focus on fulfilling your goals. My favorite is the elimination of the Room need, allowing me to let my apartments become sties without it depressing my Urb.

Goals and information about your Urb are displayed neatly on a PDA, which is a nice, clean way of organizing the information. One of the best improvements over past *Sims* games is the inclusion of minigames for skill building and job tasks. They're incredibly basic, but it's amazing how much of a difference it makes to be doing something rather than just watching your Sim. The rewards system is also well designed, continually dishing out items to the player for achieving goals along the way.

The game's big downfall is that it ends up being repetitious, even for a *Sims* game. In your first neighborhood, you figure out the basics of getting the right wardrobe, schmoozing people, and making money. And then that's about it. While the other neighborhoods (which are unlocked as your rep increases) have different styles, the gameplay is the same in all of them. It's nice for people who don't like to lose and who take comfort in sameness, and there is an addictiveness that can suck you in, but when you step away from the game, it's shocking how shallow it is.

This shallowness extends beyond the gameplay. *Urbz* is more targeted toward women than previous *Sims* titles (Build your wardrobe! Hang out with your friends!), but older *Sims* fans may be put off by the MTV vibe of the game. Female Urbz are clad almost exclusively in skimpy clothes—if your thong isn't hanging out, then it's a safe bet that you'll at least be wearing a shirt cut down to your belly button. And people's reactions to you depend more on what you're wearing than anything else—as long as you look like them, it's easy to be accepted.

It's rather like cotton candy—fun if insubstantial, without any redeeming nutritional value. But there are times when cotton candy hits the spot just fine. « *Dana Jongewaard*

CUTTING-EDGE STYLE Better graphics, streamlined needs, improved skill building
SO FIVE YEARS AGO Really repetitive gameplay

Pub. EA Games **Dev.** EA Games **ESRB** T **MSRP** $49.99

RATING [●●●◐○]

INSTEAD...
Watch the entire ***Lord of the Rings*** trilogy, read both ***Hamlet*** and ***Macbeth***, hit on and make out with a hot level 36 elf at a LARPing party in the woods, spend a day at a Renaissance fair in full chain mail

KING ARTHUR

ONCE UPON A WASTED TIME

When I watched the first few making-of *King Arthur* video clips (doled out as rewards for finishing the game's mind-numbing levels), I thought they were funny. So many unlovable movies these days see release on DVDs stuffed with storyboards, interviews, and random production debris. For an unlovable game to follow suit seemed both inevitable and ridiculous.

"Who are they kidding?!! Who gives a damn?!!" I asked as I worked up my usual melodramatic indignation (which, like many of my countrymen, I take great pleasure in). The game is one long wave of monotonous, sloppy combat, with your chosen character helplessly flailing around in the midst of never-ending enemy mobs, your television slimed in dull grays and browns sliced here and there by ugly, stupid effects (who decided to use toxic green clouds to represent healing?). The levels, book-ended by long, unskippable scenes from the movie, end abruptly after some unsaid goal is complete (usually the arse kicking of a few hundred faceless, grunting clones in loincloths). That anyone would want to get a "behind the scenes" look at this crap is hilarious.

After watching a few more of these clips, though, it all started to depress me: movie actors getting facial scans, stuntmen swinging swords around in a motion-capture studio, sets from the movie rendered in detail, all these folks working hard. How many hours of precious time were wasted on a game that few will play and fewer will enjoy? I feel pangs of regret having only played it. Imagine how you'd feel if you were the guy they hired to painstakingly reproduce horse carts and grass huts. Life is too short for this game. « *Robert Ashley*

VERDICT A massive movie's effort wasted on a subpar medieval action game

Pub. Konami **Dev.** Krome Studios **ESRB** T **MSRP** $39.99

RATING [●○○○○]

WARNING

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KID GAMES

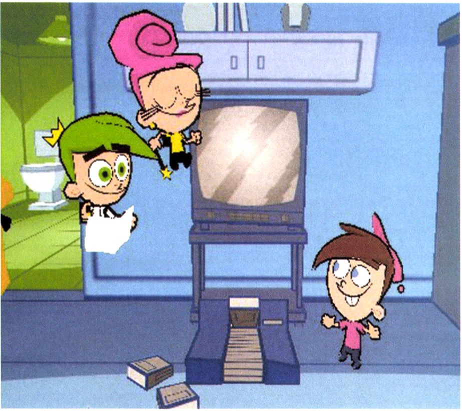
FOURTEEN KID-SAFE GAMES FOR THE HOLIDAYS

Hardcore gamers usually vehemently oppose charges that videogames are "just for kids," citing the evidence that is hitting shelves every week between now and the end of the year. As a reaction to this, the games that are specifically designed to be "just for kids" are overlooked or dismissed by many, and even the publishers dial back the hyperbole so as to not divert attention from the big-budget adult fare. It's time for this to change, though. Gamers are getting older and having kids of their own, and much as our 6-year-olds are probably better at takedowns in *Burnout 3* than we are, it's time to pay closer attention to the games specifically aimed at younger players. Let's face it: We're all guilty of secretly watching Nickelodeon from time to time, and there's no denying that good kids' entertainment can frequently tickle the funny bone of even the most cynical and jaded gamers.

Every year, games focused on the younger end of the market sneak out and quietly set sales records. You want proof? The last *SpongeBob SquarePants* game on PS1 outsold *Jak and Daxter*. This year there are some truly superb games rated "E for Everyone," which is information any of you who are parents will likely be extremely pleased to hear. Some of them are so good, though (like *SpongeBob SquarePants: The Movie*, which we reviewed last month), that everyone should check them out.

FAIRLY ODD PARENTS: SHADOW SHOWDOWN

WANDS AND WINGS, FLOATY CROWNY THINGS



There's plenty to like about THQ's *Shadow Showdown*, especially if you're a fan of Nick's wacky show. The game's style is faithful to the cartoon, and the script and voices are just as goofy as you'd hope. Cosmo, in particular, raises plenty of laughs with his dim-witted asides and bizarre observations, as do Timmy's parents and the ever-stoic Jorgen Von Strangle.

The game plunders a host of scenarios from the show for gameplay cues, whether it's the space-age platforming of Crash Nebula or the superheroic exploits of Cleft the Boy Chin Wonder. Objectives are mostly simple puzzle-solving exercises; run here, collect this, open that, jump on this. It's easy enough for very young gamers, but not so dull that watching parents will nod off.

As seems to be the trend with kids' games this year, the main game is supplemented by six two-player minigames (three of which must be unlocked) that are all particularly fun for kids to play with each other or for parents who want to join in the fun, too.

Complaints? It's a bit expensive for what you get. Considering the value of games like *Ty 2*, the additional $20 you're paying here brings little more than recognizable Nickelodeon characters. « John Davison

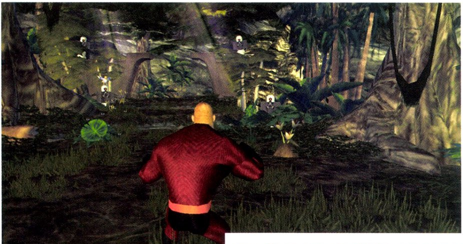
PROS Fans of the show will dig the humor and graphics
CONS It seems a little overpriced, considering the competition

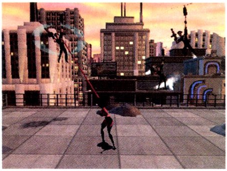
Pub. THQ **Dev.** Blitz Games **ESRB** E **MSRP** $39.99

RATING [●●●◐○]

THE INCREDIBLES

NOT REALLY INCREDIBLE, BUT STILL PRETTY GOOD





'Tis the holiday season, when greed reigns supreme and hot movie properties are marketed every which way to squeeze another dollar from your pocket. So does *The Incredibles* deserve more of your free-flowing cash?

As with most of the other film-based games we've seen, the story follows the movie, and cut-scenes from the film link the whole thing together. While it's tough to compete with a film as gorgeous as *The Incredibles*, the game does a good job of holding its own. You get to fight in a variety of environments, and the colors are as vivid as those in the film.

Getting to play as five different characters is a lot of fun, as each character has different moves that correspond with their specific superpower. Attack mechanics are simple, but the animations that accompany them are pretty neat—go through a room as Mr. Incredible and punch out three or four villains at a time, or watch as Elastigirl stretches her arms and plucks villains hovering in the air above her. The different powers lend themselves to different styles of levels as well; for example, Dash's levels focus on races rather than combat.

Some areas of the game are fairly simple, but there are parts that are just stinking hard. This is tolerable when it's just a difficult sequence to master, but it's frustrating when the difficulty stems from less-than-responsive controls. Boss battles can be quite lengthy affairs, and when you spend 20 minutes in a battle against a gigantic six-legged robot only to have to face it again one level later, it gets a bit tedious.

Titles that can be played by the whole family are few and far between, but this is one of them. Don't be too put off by the T-rating, if you're fine with your kids seeing the movie, the game is safe. « Dana Jongewaard

HEROIC Nice variety of superpower-wielding fun, great graphics
EVIL Not-so-polished controls, repetitive boss battles

Pub. THQ **Dev.** Heavy Iron **ESRB** T **MSRP** $39.99

RATING [●●●◐○]

THE POLAR EXPRESS

HO HO HO

The Polar Express is a series of minigames that range from steering through obstacle courses to completing simple rhythm-based levels; connecting the games into a cohesive plot are scenes from the film of the same name (which you can skip past if you find the CG effects as creepy as the *OPM* editors do). One of the better levels is reminiscent of a 2D classic like *Donkey Kong*—you hop your way through a pile of presents to get to the top.

The game is very short, just a few hours at most. However, for those who have an EyeToy, there are a couple of minigames included as bonus content—in one, you decorate a Christmas tree while fending off puppets who try to steal your ornaments; in another you drive the Polar Express while trying not to smash snowmen.

The game's simplicity makes this a questionable choice for anyone over 8, but young kids will likely enjoy it. « Dana Jongewaard

NICE Good for young kids, nice variety
NAUGHTY Very short, some awkward levels

Pub. THQ **Dev.** Blue Tongue **ESRB** E **MSRP** $29.99

RATING [●●●○○]

SHARK TALE

SLEEP WITH THE FISHES

Yep, it's another kids' game based on a movie license and composed of a series of minigames that are connected by clips from the blockbuster CG animated film. These 25 levels under the sea include stealth missions, search missions, little fighting games, and rhythm games. Each level has three different passing ranks, and you get different rewards depending on how well you do.

The games themselves are decent, but the camera can be really awkward at times. Sometimes it's merely annoying, but other times, it seriously hampers your ability to play the game: One level makes you dodge jellyfish tentacles, but the camera continually circles, so you can't always see which way they're striking.

This is your average uninspired kids' game, but it's seriously overpriced at $50—$30 would have been a much more appropriate price point for what you get. « Dana Jongewaard

PROS Entertaining minigames, movie clips
CONS Messy camera, way overpriced

Pub. Activision **Dev.** Edge of Reality **ESRB** E **MSRP** $49.99

RATING [●●◐○○]

DIGIMON RUMBLE ARENA 2

THE RUMBLE OF MEDIOCRITY

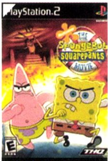
Imagine a game like Nintendo's *Super Smash Bros.*, only everything that makes *Smash Bros.* good isn't actually in it. *Digimon Rumble Arena 2* has all of the basic elements of a fun brawling game; however, it's anything but that. Part of the problem is the fighting mechanics, which are so mind-numbingly simple that a cat licking the controller could probably win a few battles. In fact, if you just close your eyes and press the Square button repeatedly, you shouldn't have any problems on most stages. Digivolved versions of characters usually have only two or three worthwhile moves and the same basic combinations.

The only aspect of the game helping it avoid becoming a complete disaster are the arenas. A lot of them have some excellent interactivity that lets you destroy the objects in the background. They look really nice for the most part, but the gameplay cancels out any fun you might have in them. « Giancarlo Varanini

PROS Nice environments
CONS Too-easy play, characters aren't great

Pub. Bandai **Dev.** Bandai **ESRB** E **MSRP** $39.99

RATING [●●●○○]



SPONGEBOB SQUAREPANTS: THE MOVIE

"A game that's an excellent movie tie-in with great graphics and a funny script—and it's fun."

[●●●●◐]

NICK TOONS: MOVIN'

A MOVING DIVERSION

***Movin'* includes** some excellent tie-ins with some of Nick's hottest toons; like *EyeToy: Play*, *Movin'* provides precious little depth, but as a way of getting the kids up out of their seats, the collection works nearly as well.

It's worth noting, though, that the games in *Play* are fairly simple, so *Movin'* isn't a must-buy for adults. Several games are Nick-branded retreads of *Play*'s games, and a couple (the *Jimmy Neutron*–themed Deflect-o-Matic and the *Danny Phantom*–based Portal Party) are just boring.

But a few are absolutely hysterical and use the EyeToy in interesting ways. Fairly Odd Invasion, for example, puts your picture inside a clear ball as you paddle your hands to roll over invading robots; the *Rocket Power* game Hanging Out lets players tilt their arms to steer a hang glider. These are outnumbered by the more "bleh" games, but with the package costing a mere $20, it hardly matters. « Joe Rybicki

HITS Bowling, boating, beating up bots
MISSES Sliding puzzles, blatant *Play* knockoffs

Pub. THQ **Dev.** Mass Media **ESRB** E **MSRP** $19.99

RATING [●●●○○]

TAK 2: THE STAFF OF DREAMS

NOT BAD, BUT NOT DREAMY

Why are kids' games so often more frustrating than their adult-oriented counterparts? *Tak 2* is—both manually and cerebrally—considerably more challenging than any of this season's big platformers. The puzzle-oriented gameplay is introduced well, but before long, your youngster will need to start seriously exercising problem-solving skills to figure out how best to exploit the woodland creatures in and around Tak's world. This would be great by itself, but the unresponsive controls and often flagrantly uncooperative camera will stretch your tyke's patience.

If your tot's not prone to temper tantrums, though, there's a lot to like, including lush environments, cartoony animals that form the basis of the game's puzzles, and some truly hysterical dialogue made particularly funny by the voice work of Patrick Warburton (*Seinfeld, The Tick*). As long as you and yours can stand some frustration, it's a solid purchase. « Joe Rybicki

PROS Lush graphics, animal-based puzzles
CONS Horrendously ugly dream world

Pub. THQ **Dev.** Avalanche Software **ESRB** E **MSRP** $39.99

RATING [●●●◐○]

POWER RANGERS: DINO THUNDER

IT'S NO VOLTRON

In most cases, dinosaurs are awesome, but the cast of lizards in *Power Rangers: Dino Thunder* doesn't do it for me. It's not totally the dinosaurs' fault—the game is just inherently tedious. Instead of a straightforward fast-paced action game, *Dino Thunder* is set up as a series of missions that don't amount to much more than fetch quests. You're told to fetch bones, fly through circles, and kill a specific type of enemy multiple times, and it just gets irritating.

The so-called action portions of the game don't do *Dino Thunder* any favors, either. Targeting is mostly automatic, so when you shift the camera around, the computer automatically selects the closest thing to your character. This does you no good when you're surrounded by a group of enemies and trying to hit a specific target. *Dino Thunder* is obviously trying to mimic the feel of free-roaming gameplay, but it fails to be entertaining about it. « Giancarlo Varanini

PROS Giant robot dinosaurs, only $20
CONS Mission structure is boring and tedious

Pub. THQ **Dev.** Pacific Coast **ESRB** E **MSRP** $19.99

RATING [●●○○○]

DON'T BUY

the following games for your child unless you're looking for a substitute for a lump of coal: *Crash Twinsanity, A Dog's Life, Scooby-Doo: Mystery Mayhem, Spyro: A Hero's Tail.*

SITTING DUCKS
SEMILAME DUCK

Sitting Ducks is one of the largest kid games to hit the market—in essence, it's an E-rated *GTA*. Play the main missions to further the story, run around the town, collect objects, earn vehicles, upgrade vehicles—there's a ton to do, and it's wrapped up into a very endearing package.

I really want to like this game, but a couple of things get in the way. Controls are wonky, which could be frustrating for young players. It's difficult to avoid bumping into things; what's worse is that those bumps cause you to lose feathers, the game's currency. Also, the minimap marking mission locations has no roads marked, so you spend a lot of time running into dead ends before you finally get to where you want to go.

A lot of care was put into building the game, which makes its flaws all the more frustrating. However, it is only $10, so if your child has the patience of a saint, plop down the money and give it a try. « Dana Jongewaard

VERDICT Awesome gameplay is brought down by construction flaws.

Pub. Hip Interactive **Dev.** Hip Interactive **ESRB** E **MSRP** $9.99

RATING [●●●○○]

YU YU HAKUSHO: DARK TOURNAMENT
FIGHTING DETECTIVES?

Yu Yu Hakusho is a show about the adventures of a spirit detective who participates in a massive tournament. In this game based on the anime, you compete in the 32-match tournament (complete with clips from the show) and other fighting staples, as well as the "token game," which is a card game stapled onto a checkers set. As expected, there's a host of playable characters straight from the show.

YYH's problem is with the controls, which are shallow yet complicated. The move set isn't very large or complex, but doing simple things like jumping or ducking requires you to hold down the D-pad and X button—which means any combos that start from either a crouch or a jump become annoyingly hard to pull off. This is a serviceable fighter for fans of the franchise, but if your kids want to learn how to fight, why not get an actual fighting game with good controls and moves instead? « Thierry Nguyen

VERDICT A mediocre fighter for nondiscriminatory *YYH* fans who want to fight.

Pub. Atari **Dev.** Digital Fiction **ESRB** E **MSRP** $39.99

RATING [●●◐○○]

SD GUNDAM FORCE: SHOWDOWN!
SUPERDEFORMED DIABLO

Don't let the absurdity of robotic Gundams with superdeformed heads dissuade you from this game. What you get is a surprising little action-based dungeon crawler—think of it as *Devil May Cry* with loot or *Diablo* with cute little robots. You take a goofy-looking bobbleheaded Gundam, teleport into a level, smack some stuff up, and collect orbs from fallen enemies. In between levels, you can buy items to help you for the next round. For characters, you have your good all-around Capt. Gundam, graceful winged knight Zero, and sword-loving samurai Bakunetsumaru. As with many games, the camera could use a fair bit of work, and older gamers might find the action a bit on the repetitive side, with not enough variance to keep their interest.

If you want to impart the important skills of twitchily thwacking bad dudes in dungeons on to a younger sibling, *SD Gundam Force: Showdown!* is a good start. « Thierry Nguyen

VERDICT A solid dungeon crawler with brightly colored, enthusiastic Gundams.

Pub. Bandai **Dev.** Tom Create **ESRB** E **MSRP** $39.99

RATING [●●●◐○]

JIMMY NEUTRON: ATTACK OF THE TWONKIES
WE LOVE TWINKIES

Jimmy Neutron is a fine role model in that he teaches kids that wacky objects and doohickeys can be made by common household objects. Of course, the real-world wisdom of attaching magnets to your shoes is questionable, but at least it tells kids to create rather than destroy.

This objective-based platformer (structured as a series of "episodes" that center on Jimmy accidentally bringing the Twonkies back to Earth) features lots of puzzles that require inventions to solve. To make these inventions, Jimmy has to find random objects scattered throughout the game world and figure out how to put them together to get what he needs. In between hoofing around and inventing things, you get to pilot Jimmy's rocket and blast asteroids and other floating detritus.

The actual platforming is fairly blasé. It's a solid-enough game with neat invention-based hooks, but that's about it. « Thierry Nguyen

VERDICT A standard platformer with edutaining invention-based puzzles.

Pub. THQ **Dev.** THQ **ESRB** E **MSRP** $19.99

RATING [●●●○○]

YU-GI-OH! CAPSULE MONSTER COLISEUM
FF TACTICS POKÉMON COLISEUM

Not being 6-years-old, I have only a fragment of a clue as to who Yu-Gi-Oh is and what he does. I do understand this game, though, which is a vanilla strategy-RPG. Move your pieces around a board and try to eliminate your opponent's pieces first. Each monster has a specific movement and attack range and carries attributes that are decently balanced (fire is weak against water, which is weak against wind, which is weak against wood, which is weak against fire, and so on). The battlefield itself occasionally changes shape, which merits extra attention; your units gain experience and can even fuse with each other; and the A.I. is competent (there's also a multiplayer mode if you tire of fighting the PS2).

If you're a *Yu-Gi-Oh!* fan who knows what the heck a Cockroach Knight is, then you understand this game much better than I (or anyone over 15) do. For the rest of us, it's a passable strategy-RPG. « Thierry Nguyen

VERDICT A competent intro to strategy-RPGs, and manna from heaven for *Yu-Gi-Oh!* fans.

Pub. Konami **Dev.** Konami **ESRB** E **MSRP** $39.99

RATING [●●●○○]

TY THE TASMANIAN TIGER 2: BUSH RESCUE
BATTLING BARGAIN

***Ty 2* seems to have it all:** a huge open environment, gorgeous graphics, superb production values, myriad fluffy animals with Australian accents (what is it with kids' entertainment and Australians these days? Kids' television is full of them), and a ton of different gameplay styles, from giant robot combat to basic hop-n-bop action. On top of that, it has a seven-level two-player splitscreen kart-racing game, and it's an entire penny shy of 20 bucks. It's easily superior to many games in the genre, and at times it seems to be nipping at the heels of the likes of *Jak* and *Ratchet*. It skews a little older than some of the games featured here (tackling the topic of diplomatic immunity, among others, which is probably over the head of the average 8-year-old), and although firmly in the kids' camp, it's something that anyone can enjoy, thanks to the great controls and terrific variety in the gameplay. « John Davison

VERDICT It's quite a lot of game for not a lot of cash.

Pub. EA Games **Dev.** Kroma Studios **ESRB** E **MSRP** $19.99

RATING [●●●●○]

DON'T WANT TO SHARE YOUR PS2?

If you want a little kid-free PS2 time to indulge your darker side, then put your kids in front of the PC and steer them toward Nick.com. The young'uns can spend hours of entertainment with Flash games based on some of Nickelodeon's most popular franchises.

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MERCENARIES
PLAYGROUND OF DESTRUCTION™

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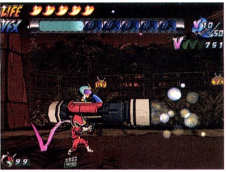
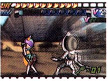
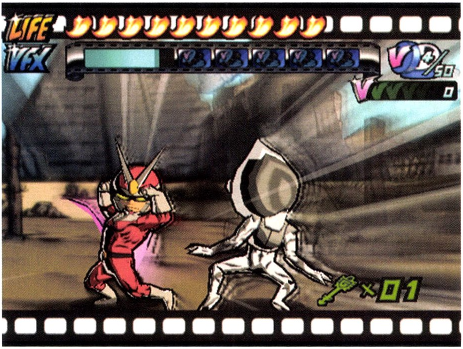






VIEWTIFUL MOVES
I learned this too late, so here's my tip for you: If you hold down R2, you not only switch characters, but you pull off an awesome combo attack.

VIEWTIFUL JOE 2

NO ORDINARY JOE

***Viewtiful Joe* was one** of the better pure action games released this year, with its slick cel-shaded 2D art style, crazy and comic presentation, and well-honed beat-em-up gameplay mechanics. *Viewtiful Joe 2* maintains the sensibilities of the previous crazy caper while adding some interesting new tweaks and features.

As much as *VJ1* is an homage to *Ultraman* and comic books, *VJ2* goes further with the crazy riffs on pop culture—movies especially. The first level combines *Jurassic Park* with war movies. A later level is a martial-artist-filled village that wouldn't be out of place in *Fist of the White Lotus* (which itself was referenced in *Kill Bill*). One of the enemies you take on is a mechanical, *VJ*-styled version of those pesky aliens that Sigourney Weaver is always fighting. *Voltron* fans will get a kick out of a new mode of the Six Six Machine (which itself has new iterations—a sub and a drill—for side-scrolling levels). Heck, the story centers on Joe and Silvia hunting for the "Rainbow Oscars" before the Black Emperor can snag them.

While Silvia was an unlockable character in *VJ1*, she's now part of a key gameplay element in *VJ2*. Early reports of *VJ2* sporting a two-player cooperative mode are inaccurate—the cooperative mode actually means that you switch between Joe and Silvia on the fly (just hit R2). The all-new Replay power (which allows you to perform one action thrice, such as hitting a button/enemy for puzzles or triple damage, or eating a burger for triple health) is exclusive to Silvia, so you have to switch to her for some of the puzzles.

VJ2 has some serious puzzles going on. *VJ1* mixes up its beat-em-up action with occasional brainteasers, and *VJ2* ups the brain-wracking count. Buttons must be pushed, massive hamster wheels must be rotated, candles must be lit, and rooms must be slid back and forth. In fact, I often had a harder time figuring out what to do than how best to punch my way past some boss.

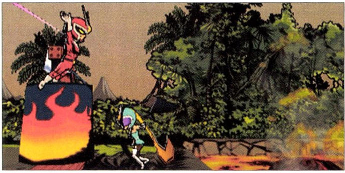
For this round, the bosses are even more bizarre than before; they range from a recurring dinosaur who sports a different costume for each level (I particularly like his drill sergeant and kung fu master getups) to a mad scientist squid to a gigantic missile-launching Buddha. Oh, and there's also what is either the best or worst name-based pun ever, a lizard boss named "Cameo Leon." There's even a boss who is essentially the love child of the Death Star and Unicron. While *VJ2* repeats the same annoying part of *VJ1* (where you have to fight the previous few bosses all over again), at least *VJ2* lets you save in between each battle.

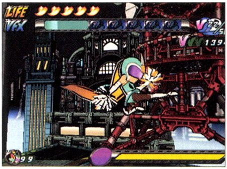
Unfortunately, while *VJ2* is polished extremely well, it just doesn't go quite far enough. It feels more like an extended director's cut of *VJ1* than a full-blown sequel. As neat as Silvia's Replay power is, her underwhelming fighting abilities (her guns are more a novelty than an actual fighting style) kept on making me forget that she's available, which often resulted in me being stuck in a puzzle because I'm using Joe. *VJ2* is the better overall game, but it's a very rudimentary and evolutionary step rather than a revolutionary leap forward. « *Thierry Nguyen*

THUMBS UP Better puzzles, cooler bosses, neat new power and characters
THUMBS DOWN It feels more like an expansion than an actual sequel

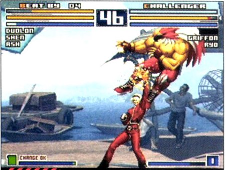
Pub. Capcom **Dev.** Clover Studio **ESRB** T **MSRP** $39.99

RATING ●●●●◐





LIFE
VFX
10 VIEWTIFULS!



KING OF FIGHTERS

A ROYAL PAIN IN THE YOU-KNOW-WHAT

The best thing about *King of Fighters 02/03* isn't the fact that it contains both *King of Fighters 2002* and *2003*, but rather that these two games can offer noticeably different fighting experiences. *King of Fighters 2002* represents more of the old-school style of the series with team matches that let you switch around characters before the start of each fight. Meanwhile, *KOF 2003* uses a tag system similar to that of Capcom's *Vs.* games, letting you switch in characters on the fly—well, almost on the fly, since there's time for your opponent to hit you before the characters switch.

Normally, you might think it's a minimal difference, but it actually changes the flow of *KOF* gameplay for the better if you're a fan of Capcom's 2D fighting games. Fights are generally much quicker, and moves are a little easier to execute. By contrast, *KOF 2002* is a little slower and requires more precision to pull of some of the more complicated moves and combinations. Actually, the controls in *2002* are horrible by comparison. Even the simplest moves (even those using the basic fireball motion) are inexplicably hard to pull off. You may not notice at first, but just go back and forth between the two games a few times and the differences will jump right out at you.

Despite the updated 3D backgrounds and usual assortment of extras, both games look and sound a bit dated in comparison to other 2D fighters, and if you already own *KOF 2000* and *2001*, then it makes the package even less enticing. Still, in the grand scheme of fighting games, *KOF 2002* and *2003* offer more of what SNK's flagship fighting series is known for, so if you're already a fan, this should be a rental at the very least. If nothing else, it beats spending around $200 to $300 on a NeoGeo cartridge the size of a small rodent. « *Giancarlo Varanini*

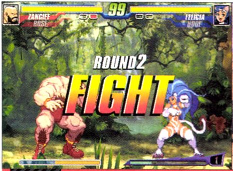
PROS Two games in one package, tag system is fun
CONS Both games are pretty dated, controls in *2002* are stiff
VERDICT Worthwhile for the hardcore crowd

Pub. SNK Playmore **Dev.** SNK Playmore **ESRB** T **MSRP** $39.99

RATING [●●◐○○]

A BIT OF HISTORY

Even with its problems, *King of Fighters 02/03* marks a special moment in videogame history. They are the last two *KOF* games ported from SNK's NeoGeo hardware. The rest of the *KOF* games and other SNK games will be released on Sammy's cheap Atomiswave arcade hardware.



64
ANAKARIS
LEO

CAPCOM FIGHTING EVOLUTION

A TRAIN WRECK IN 2D FIGHTING FORM

Dear Capcom,

I like 2D fighters, as do many other people, and for years, fans have enjoyed your 2D fighting games in particular. Even when some of your franchises seemed to be milked bone dry, you came up with a new gimmick to make them interesting, whether it was tag-style matches, new countering systems, or amazing animation.

But you did nothing for *Capcom Fighting Evolution* except create a horrible roster of characters. If you don't think that's the case, I present the characters from *Red Star*, a fighting game that wasn't really good (or at least good enough to warrant this sort of attention) to begin with. For that reason, I can understand why you chose these characters. Most people avoided *Red Star*, so the characters actually seem brand new to most—kind of like NBC's "If you haven't seen it, it's new to you" thing.

As bad as the roster is, the game itself is fine, and by fine I mean you couldn't have possibly made it more boring. The *Street Fighter* characters, especially Ryu, are essentially overpowered in this game because their combinations and timing are much more precise than those of most of the other members of the cast. Additionally, there really isn't any significant new gameplay element aside from the ability to manually select characters midround. It's just a complete mess, and you missed an excellent opportunity to capitalize on a great concept.

Your former customer, « *Giancarlo Varanini*

PROS You know in seconds that it's bad
CONS Some sprites are so very old, unbalanced gameplay, horrible roster

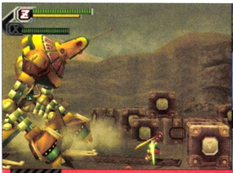
Pub. Capcom **Dev.** Capcom **ESRB** T **MSRP** $29.99

RATING [●◐○○○]

PlayStation

PLAY IT!

The latest *Mega Man* offering is available in demo form on the disc. Check it out now.



MEGA MAN X8

BACK TO OLD FORM

Capcom tried to deviate from the traditional *Mega Man* formula in *Mega Man X7* by introducing some new 3D elements that hadn't been part of the series outside of *Legends* and other side stories. That idea didn't work too well, so it comes as somewhat of a surprise that *X8* inherited some bad traits in the form of lame third-person shooter-type levels that look and play as if they were generated by the Super Nintendo's awesome Mode 7 scaling effects. These levels just aren't all that interesting since you're confined to a rail that speeds you through them.

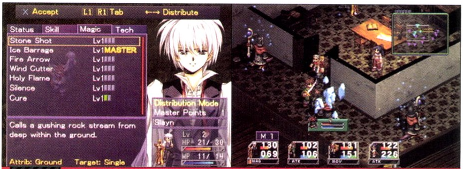
But not all of the ideas from *Mega Man X7* that made the jump to *X8* are bad. The tag-team system (which lets you select two characters per level and switch them on the fly) returns and actually works quite well. You'll find that there are optimal combinations of the three characters—X, Zero, and Axl—depending on the level. One level may be designed primarily for X and Zero while another might be easier to beat with Zero and Axl. Part of the fun is discovering which duo works best. Still, even if you have the best team, a lot of the levels are quite difficult and rely more on trial and error than skill, which can be insanely frustrating at times.

There's definitely more emphasis placed on the side-scrolling action that made older *Mega Man* games popular, so fans will dig it. And while the whole trial-and-error mechanic is enough to make you throw your controller down and never return, there's a rewarding feeling when you do finally win. « *Giancarlo Varanini*

VERDICT Another *Mega Man* game for the fans, but not really for anyone else.

Pub. Capcom **Dev.** Capcom **ESRB** E **MSRP** $39.99

RATING [●●●○○]



GROWLANSER GENERATIONS

A GENERATION BETWEEN RELEASES

It sometimes seems that Working Designs is the corporate embodiment of that poster with the cat hanging by its claws from the tree branch—has it really been three years now since the company released anything? But every time it gets around to putting out another title, like *Growlanser Generations*, you're given cause to hope it keeps on, well, keeping on for a bit longer.

Growlanser's visuals might not be the greatest attractor, but the great strategy-RPGs haven't changed their 2D look in a while, and *Growlanser* fits right into the post–*Phantom Brave* landscape. The comparison is apt in other ways: *Growlanser II* and *III* are also games that do away with the isometric grid that's characterized the genre for years, though in a completely different way than *Phantom Brave* has. The *Growlanser* titles take more of a real-time strategy approach than a turn-based one.

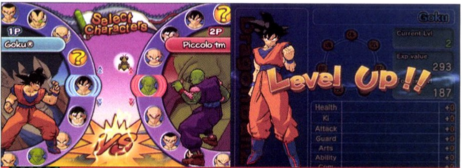
That constant activity is one of the series' greatest strengths since it allows objectives and plans to change as battlefield conditions shift. More than most strategy games, the *Growlanser* games make you feel that what goes on in the skirmishes is the plot, rather than something that happens between the story sections.

Two games at 60 hours each means there's a lot of story to work through—especially if you intend to see every one of the multiple endings for both titles. If you don't mind a plain look and don't have much money, *GG* can keep you busy for a good long time—maybe even till the next Working Designs game. « Nich Maragos

VERDICT: A solid pair of strategy games that is monetarily efficient, if a bit plain looks-wise

Pub. Working Designs **Dev.** Career Soft **ESRB** T **MSRP** $49.99

RATING ●●●●○



DRAGON BALL Z: BUDOKAI 3

BUDOKAI EVOLVED STILL FEELS LIKE BUDOKAI

The third annual *Budokai* game could have phoned in a few extra characters and backgrounds and, let's face it, the thing still would have sold like crazy thanks to the license. Fortunately, the creators were a bit more ambitious than that, and *Budokai 3* comes to us as a feature-packed, streamlined version of the formula.

Pretty much every aspect of the series has evolved: The hand-to-hand combat is flashier and has a new countermove to add variety, the Dragon universe story mode puts the pacing in the player's hands and lets you fly around freely and uncover special items, you can customize your character with the items you find or trade them with your friends, and you can build up your character's attributes as you go exploring.

But like previous *Budokai* games, *Budokai 3* still has the problem of limited player movement. You don't have much control over where your character moves for most of the round. Without a jump button or an easy way to move around freely, you're often stuck with less freedom than a character in a 2D fighter has, and considering this is *Dragon Ball*—where characters regularly fly around and move quickly in every direction—there should be even more freedom than a typical 3D fighter offers.

Still, *Budokai 3* is a really good version of *Budokai*, and it is the kind of game *Dragon Ball* fans can enjoy without feeling guilty. There's actually a good game here when you take away the license, which is more than we could say for the previous games in the series. « Matt Leone

VERDICT: It's the best and most evolved version of a *Budokai* game

Pub. Atari **Dev.** Dimps **ESRB** T **MSRP** $49.99

RATING ●●●●○

HISTORY LESSON

Dimps' President Takashi Nishiyama originally made a name for himself serving as producer of many of SNK's key fighting games, and before that, working on the *Street Fighter* series at Capcom.

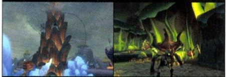
SCALER

SURPRISINGLY NOT A PIECE OF CRAP

***Scaler* was announced** at E3 in 2003 and was touted as the game that would save TDK Mediactive; in fact, TDK execs were heard bragging that this game would dominate over popular platformers such as *Jak* and *Ratchet*. That proved inaccurate on at least one count—TDK's game division was bought out by Take-Two Interactive in September of 2003 and the rights for *Scaler* were picked up by Global Star.

So will *Scaler* knock *Ratchet* or *Jak* from atop the platforming throne? Well, no. But considering that it showed up at our office unannounced and after its on-sale date, it's surprisingly good—certainly much better than anyone expected.

The plot revolves around some intergalactic conspiracy involving lizards and evil aliens and other planets; it's definitely the weakest part of the game, but who really plays platformers for the engaging plot?



There's nothing new or innovative here, but the nice level design and good movement mechanics mean that you won't be dealing with the annoying pitfalls that many similar games introduce.

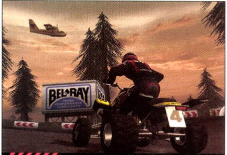
One particularly good feature is that you must unlock alter egos and transform into them to help you get past specific puzzles on individual levels. The transformation back and forth from the alter ego to the main character is smooth, and it adds a nice bit of variety to the gameplay. And the diverse levels really show off the game's excellent graphics.

You've seen most of this stuff in at least a dozen other games, but the whole package is well put together and surprisingly enjoyable. Of course, knowing that it costs a mere 20 bucks only helps compound the enjoyment. « Dana Jongewaard

PROS Great graphics, good mechanics, well-designed levels
CONS Weak story, nothing new here

Pub. Global Star **Dev.** A2M **ESRB** E **MSRP** $19.99

RATING ●●●●○



ATV OFFROAD FURY 3

UNDER NEW MANAGEMENT

Acclaim's *ATV Quad Power Racing 2* offered a nicely arcadey—and surprisingly polished—counterpoint to Sony's *ATV Offroad Fury* series. With its outrageously unbelievable courses and antisocial kick-and-punch mechanic, it was a refreshing alternative to the more realistic *Offroad Fury*.

Yes, I have a point. See, now that Rainbow—the studio behind the first two *Offroad Fury* titles—is owned by THQ, the *Offroad Fury* series has been taken over by Climax, the developer of *Quad Power Racing*. The product of this union, *ATV Offroad Fury 3*, is a somewhat schizophrenic melding of the two styles: Rainbow's simlike structure and reasonably realistic track design has been combined with Climax's unrealistic ATV handling and somewhat imprecise trick system. The result is that the game doesn't excel in many areas, and while the track design and basic game setup will be familiar to *Offroad Fury* fans, the handling will just feel *wrong*—to the point of curse-out-loud frustration.

That's not to say the game is a disappointment, though. Climax has drastically improved the incredibly strict way the series handled both colliding with obstacles and going offtrack, for example. The new studio has busted out some pretty impressive graphical tricks, too; lighting and weather effects are particularly amazing (even though they seem to cause a bit of slowdown here and there). And the game *is* awfully similar to the previous entries in the series—it'll be close enough for most casual fans, and perfectly adequate for newcomers. It just lacks that hyperrealistic polish of the earlier games.

Online, though, is where Climax redeems itself: Taking an obvious cue from Xbox Live, the online mode is seriously user-friendly, providing tons of community-building tools—the polar opposite of *Offroad Fury 2*'s laughable online attempt. You can even log in to the *Offroad Fury* servers while playing in single player to allow your scores to be posted online and your buddies to contact you. Every online PS2 game should be set up this way. « *Joe Rybicki*

PROS Nice graphics, familiar track design and structure, solid replay value, excellent online
AMATEURS Odd physics, boring track design
SOUNDTRACK Sucks—except for the deliciously weird Coheed and Cambria and Less Than Jake's rawkin' cover of "Surrender"

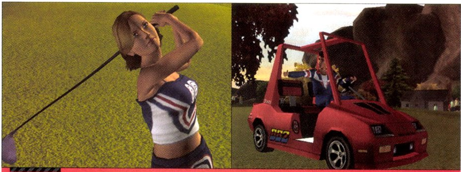
Pub. Sony CEA **Dev.** Climax **ESRB** E **MSRP** $39.99

RATING [●●●●◐]

HUMBLE BEGINNINGS
Outlaw Golf 2's commentator Dave Attell (the host of Comedy Central's *Insomniac*) got his start as a writer for *Saturday Night Live*.

PLAY IT! WATCH IT!

If you want to give *ATV Offroad Fury 3* a test-run, then play the demo on this month's disc. You can check out *Gretzky NHL 2005*'s high-sticking action in a game video, which is also conveniently located right on the very same disc.



OUTLAW GOLF 2

VIRTUAL BOOBS ARE NOT ENOUGH

It's not a particularly good sign when the best thing you can say about a golf game is that the announcer is funny. "What?" you ask. "What about the realistically bouncy CG boobies?"

Let me tell you, sitting through load screens just to watch your golfer walk around in a circle to celebrate isn't my idea of a good time—no matter how scantily clad your character is. Watching your opponents think for 30 seconds before taking a shot is not my idea of entertainment—no matter how realistically they jiggle when they finally swing (especially considering that when they do finally get it in gear, they tend to act like clumsily lobotomized chimps—for example, shooting again and again directly at a tree). And there aren't enough breasts in the world to save *OG2*'s pathetic putting system; taking a wild guess and then getting three chances to see if you're right? Er, no thanks.

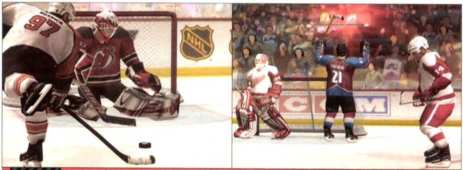
Did I mention the shooting interface itself? Picture the annoying timing of the triple-tap *Hot Shots* model combined with the occasional imprecision of the analog *Tiger* model, and you'll have some idea of what we're talking about here: It's the worst of all possible worlds!

All that said, there are a few interesting features here. The composure meter is something that should have been put into golf games years ago. And the Outlaw Range, a series of minigames that you can use to pump up your stats, is diverting. But most of the stuff in between is so terrible that it's not remotely worth the effort. « *Joe Rybicki*

PROS Character models are fairly...um...lifelike
CONS The gameplay is pure ass

Pub. Global Star **Dev.** Hypnotix **ESRB** M **MSRP** $19.99

RATING [●◐○○○]



GRETZKY NHL 2005

THE GREAT ONE BACKS SONY'S NHL REDUX

It's a shame that Sony's revisionist hockey effort is met by a lockout that's keeping Canada's national sport on ice. The comeback is worthy of note: It's slick looking, slick playing, and at first glance, it rivals the competition.

My favorite addition is a shot-aiming mechanism that's simple to use and gives instant feedback on where your shot will go. Plus, when the skaters skate, it feels right—even when they stop on a dime, they don't just stop. I welcome the realism.

Still, the game has issues. While the visuals are better, the A.I. has some problems. For one, the defense does a lot of standing around. If an offensive player doesn't enter the defender's "zone"—even on a breakaway-style opportunity—the defender will just stand, turn, and watch. For two, players are very slow to turn up the ice, generally waiting for the puck instead of receiving it in stride.

While the shot aiming is smart, the shooting meter is funky—you have to use timing to ensure the biggest blast. It makes sense, but it takes too much practice before you'll fire the puck on net. The timing takes away too many scoring ops at the wrong time.

Even with the flaws, this upstart definitely shows promise. But out of the gate, the game needs time to define itself. Where *ESPN NHL 2K5* focuses on realism and *NHL 2005* focuses on speed, this one fits somewhere, less identifiably, in the middle. « *Todd Zuniga*

PROS Aiming is simple, skating feels good
CONS Passing is too deliberate, defense stands around too much, commentary lags

Pub. Sony CEA **Dev.** Page 44 Studios **ESRB** E **MSRP** $39.99

RATING [●●◐○○]

PRINCE OF PERSIA:

MAJOR MAKEOVER WITH MIXED RESULTS

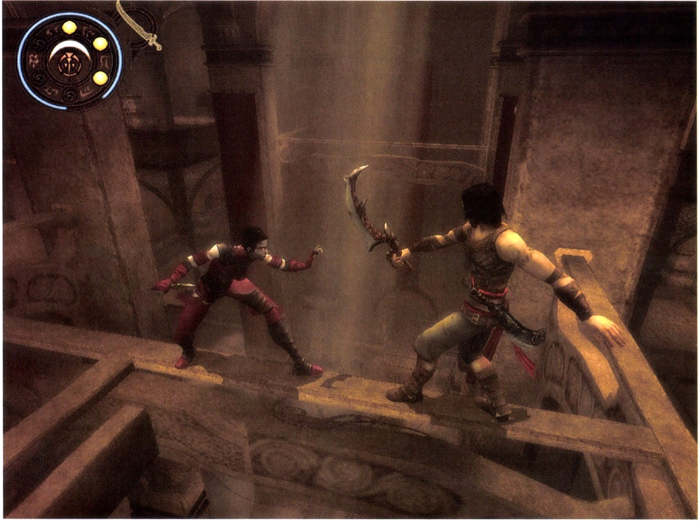
I will freely admit that I had high expectations for the sequel to *OPM*'s 2003 Game of the Year—perhaps unrealistically high. But *The Sands of Time* isn't just one of my favorite games of last year, it is one of my favorite games, period. Simple controls applied to sometimes-maddening physical puzzles in environments that are true works of art—these are the makings of a masterpiece in my book. It's the game I pick up when I start getting frustrated by the mediocre games that come across my desk to remind myself of how great things really can be.

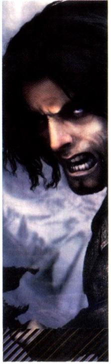
So, forgive me if I expected a bit too much from *Warrior Within*. To be fair, I certainly can't help but admire the fact that the developers weren't content to rest on their laurels and just dish out another batch of levels. And I do appreciate the guts it took to give such a fine game such a serious overhaul. I'm just not entirely happy with the results.

Don't get me wrong; there are many ways in which *Warrior Within* outstrips its predecessor—length, for example, and its cousin, difficulty: *Warrior* will easily take you twice as long to get through as *Sands*' too-short eight to 10 hours. And along the way, you'll find a great deal more variety in combat, from a much broader repertoire of combative moves to a dramatic increase in enemy toughness. If you're expecting to plow through the game by mashing on the Square button for eight hours, you're in for a surprise: You won't get far in the game before you run into enemies who simply cannot be defeated by your basic triple-tap combo. You're going to have to dig deep into the Prince's new bag of nasty tricks if you want to get more than halfway through the game.

I like this. I'm all for adding a bit of depth to *Sands*' admittedly shallow (though still visually spectacular) combat system. Sure, I could have done without the decapitations, disembowelments, and various slicings-in-half, but—eh. I can take it or leave it; it's not a big deal.

You'll also run into a phenomenon that was almost completely absent from the first game: boss battles. Now, here's the thing about the boss battles: They do serve to break up the occasional monotony of the run-of-the-mill encounters, but they're also fairly monotonous in themselves. Here's a quick Boss Battles for Dummies, completely free of charge: 1) Move toward boss. 2) Hit X to jump over him/her/it. 3) Hit Square twice to





NO TIME LIKE THE PRESENT

The introduction of large-scale time travel didn't turn out to be quite as interesting as it sounded. The Prince spends the game traveling between the present and a couple hundred years in the past through preset portals; he doesn't actually control this shift. Moreover, the "go into the past to change the future" idea is woefully underused. Maybe next time....

WARRIOR WITHIN

slash as you're coming down. 4) Repeat until one of you is dead (usually the boss). This works for four of the nine or 10 boss battles (including the two with what's-her-name, *Lady No-Pants*, whom you fight in all her Brazilian-waxed glory in this month's demo). At least three (maybe four—they all sort of ran together after a while) of the other battles are against Really Big Guy (also in the demo), and all of these encounters work the same way: Hamstring him, climb up his back, and whack him on the head.

That leaves only two really unique boss battles, and neither of them is terribly inspiring; they all felt like distractions from the runny-jumpy-climby acrobatics that make the series so fantastic. The overwhelming impression I got was that this was the designers' first attempt at boss battles. I have no idea if that's accurate; I'm just saying that's what it felt like.

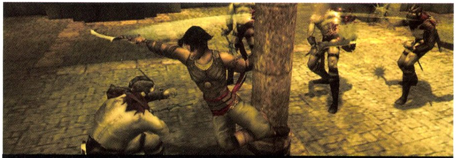
This sense of less-than-pristine polish extends elsewhere in the game, too. Take the story, for example: Far from the well-written and fairly surprising story of *Sands*, *Warrior*'s story is poorly scripted, needlessly complex, and ultimately not terribly satisfying. The setup feels somewhat arbitrary, the big twist is fairly transparently foreshadowed, and the love interest—well, the moment I realized she was *supposed* to be a love interest, I laughed out loud because the exchange is so clumsy and out of place. It's the polar opposite of the smart, clever interplay between the Prince and Farah in *Sands of Time*.

But maybe that was intentional; maybe the designers meant to portray the Prince as a bit of a heel in keeping with his new tough-guy image. If so, it's as unpleasant as most of the attempts to forcibly inject machismo into the game. I really could have done without the Prince's one-liner battle cries, for example: "I am the Prince of Persia, and the King of Blades!" "Face the Prince, pay the price!" "Do you see the light?!" Er...no. And

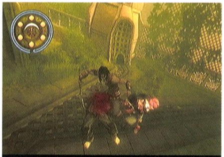
"I AM THE PRINCE OF PERSIA, AND THE KING OF BLADES!" ER...NO.

EXTENDED CUT

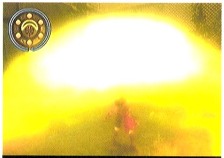
THIS OLD PRINCE LEARNS NEW KILLS



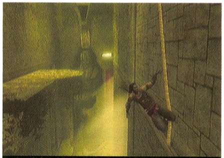
Spin Alley: A quick button-tap allows the Prince to swing around any pillar to attack groups of enemies.



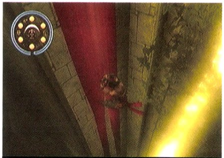
Decapitado: Advanced finishing moves clear up enemies' headaches in a hurry or cleanly divide bad guys in two—for sharing!



Massive Attack: Late in the game, the Prince learns a new time power that inflicts serious damage on any enemy in the vicinity.



Learning the Ropes: The Prince can now climb, swing on, and attack from ropes hanging off walls, augmenting his wall-run maneuver.



Curtain Call: Long, flowing tapestries now serve as one-way paths to lower levels when the Prince plunges his sword in them.

BOSSED AROUND

The gryphon at left was originally supposed to be in *The Sands of Time.* I, for one, am grateful it wasn't; it's a fairly boring encounter in an all but featureless room that doesn't really seem to add much to the game. Sort of like most of the other boss fights.

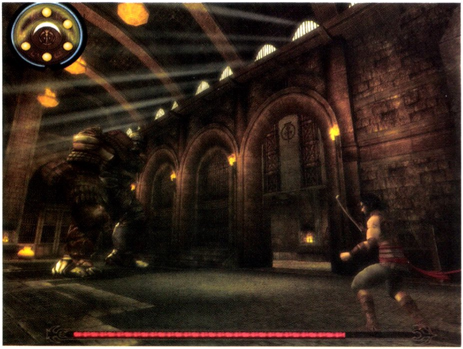
you know that laughable death-metalloid racket that kicks in about halfway through the first level in the demo? That's not placeholder—that's *actually in the game*. All *over* the game, in fact. I wish I could have been there for that meeting: "You know what a game based in ancient Persia really needs? Those electric guitars the kids love!"

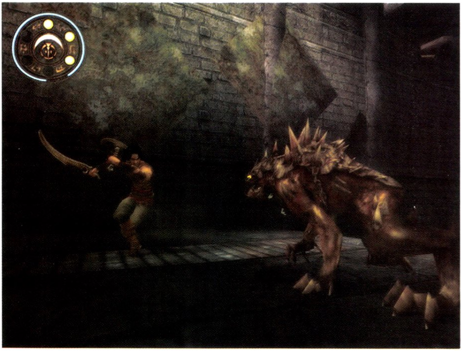
But you know what? In spite of these (in my opinion, misguided) attempts to graft a kind of hipness onto the game, *Warrior Within* still rocks. The story may be clumsy, but it's still light-years more interesting than the plots of most of the adventure and/or platforming fare available. The boss battles may be poorly executed, but they're still interesting enough to deliver at least a taste of the sense of wonder that *Sands* made us expect. And there may be a handful of moments when the level design feels a bit awkward, or the puzzles feel a bit too familiar, or the writing sounds stilted and forced—but name me one other game in which it's such a joy just to move your character around, just to run him through his paces.

In the end, it's the similarities to *The Sands of Time* that pull *Warrior Within* away from the threat of major disappointment. It's running, jumping, flipping, and balancing...and then rewinding to do it all again. It's walking into a room with no idea how you're going to get from point A to point B and then figuring it out through the use of your wits (or failing that, delicious trial and error). It's gaping at gorgeous renderings of crumbling castles, lush gardens, and vertiginous heights.

YOU WON'T MISTAKE THIS FOR ANYTHING BUT PRINCE OF PERSIA.

Ultimately, although *Warrior Within* lacks *Sands of Time*'s clean simplicity and polish, it's enough like its predecessor that fans won't have too much to complain about. You may be as annoyed by the new direction as I am, or you may think it is a brilliant move. But you're not going to mistake this for anything but *Prince of Persia.* « *Joe Rybicki*





PROS Much longer and tougher, combat is much deeper, basic gameplay from *Sands* is all present and accounted for

CONS New hard-ass style is unnecessary and out of place, boss battles are fairly monotonous, story is much weaker than *Sands'*

VERDICT Still great—just not quite as great

Pub. Ubisoft **Dev.** Ubisoft **ESRB** M **MSRP** $49.99

RATING [●●●●○]

PLAY IT YOURSELF

STEP BY STEP THROUGH THIS MONTH'S DEMO

The first half of the demo is the first scene in the game. For most of it, all you need to do is follow the onscreen instructions. Work your way to the back of the boat and you'll eventually come up against Janie Pantsless, who will try her hardest to separate your head from your neck. The best approach is to hit ⊗ while moving toward her to jump over her, press □, □ to slash on the way down, and repeat. If the camera suddenly jumps to a close-up, jam on □ to push her back.

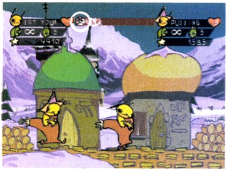
The second half of the demo comes from a segment much later in the game. Go down the ladder and fight three enemies. You won't have a second weapon at this point, so why not try a weapon-stealing maneuver? Hit △, ○ to get behind an enemy, then keep hitting ○ until he gives up the goods. Once you've beaten them all, run through the rotating blades and into the next room.

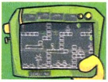
Here, grab the rotating lever and turn it one half-circle. You should still have your second weapon, so try a few button combinations on the new enemies to see what you come up with. One of our favorites is △, △, □, □, △, △—spectacular! Then run up the wall in the right-hand room to flip the switch and go through the door that opens.

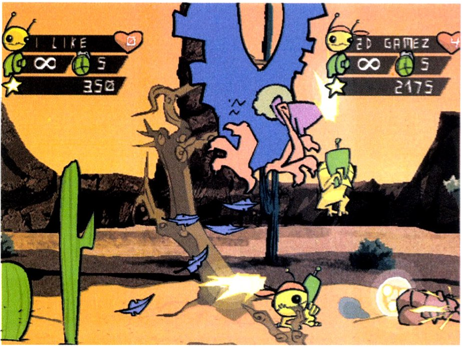
More enemies in this room; try hitting △ or □ near the pillar to pull off some spin attacks. Once you've finished with them, refresh yourself at the fountain, then head to the left and climb onto the ledge on your right. Jump toward the opposite wall and keep jumping until you're at the level above.

Head in and grab your new sword—and meet your new friend! Yes, it's Monsieur le Grand, and you probably already know how to beat him by now: Whack at the backs of his legs until he goes down on one knee. Then climb up his back and whack at his head until he starts reaching for you. Avoid his arms if possible by leaning to the opposite side, then resume the whacking. If you're having trouble with the timing, hold L1 to rewind briefly and try it again.

Once he's defeated, you can watch the video to see what all those decapitations and disembowelments would have looked like if they hadn't been sanitized for your protection. Oh, and don't worry if you leave the game to idle; you'll have time to jump back in as long as the game-footage video is playing.







PLAY WITH AN ALIEN FRIEND

If there's one thing more fun than blasting through the game on your own, it's blasting through it with a buddy. Seeing as the action gets more than a little crazy, you can give your yellow dudes different types of hats so you can keep track of what the hell is going on.

ALIEN HOMINID

CHARM, WIT, AND GOOD LOOKS

We've been championing *Alien Hominid*'s transition from superpopular online browser game to PS2 übershooter for months now. Was it worth all of our breathless enthusiasm? In short, yes. Here's a game that will take you back to the good old days, when all games were 2D side-scrollers and you could get all the fun you could ever need out of just shooting stuff. *Hominid* melds old-school ideas from *Contra, Metal Slug,* and *Gunstar Heroes* and gives them a beautiful hand-drawn look that you can't help but smile at. The eponymous alien is such a cheeky little guy (you just *know* you want to go to www.alienhominid.com and buy a T-shirt for $20), and more wit and imagination seem to have been put into just one level than many games have in their entirety. It relentlessly throws chaotic and crazy new concepts at you, and assuming you have the chops to make it through, you're never staring at the same thing for more than a few moments. One minute you're controlling a giant abominable snowman as he gorges on KGB agents; the next, you're piloting a reconstructed flying saucer around FBI helicopters before dropping back to ground level and attacking a giant amorphous butterscotch-pudding monster that pukes on you. The game revels in its own ultraviolent ridiculousness, and in doing so, it does a remarkable job of evoking Japanese game design at its wackiest while retaining a certain Western style.

The gameplay is by no means perfect, though. It's a living hell of cheap deaths, one-shot kills and unfriendly spawn points; plus, it's ludicrously difficult on anything other than Easy mode. It'll kick your ass *hard* until you program your brain to remember attack patterns, but once you've attained the Zen-like meditative state needed to progress without dying every five seconds, it's incredibly rewarding. Although boasting 16 levels, it's actually quite a short game. Those of you with freakishly attuned reflexes will be able to blast through it in a few hours, but anyone over the age of 29 is going to need to take a break from the frenetic "Oh my god I can't see what's going on" action from time to time. It never stops being either stylish or fun, though, and how many games can you say that about that feature a goofy-looking yellow alien? Just one. « *John Davison*

PROS Stylish, witty, old-school fun
CONS It's tough, in no small part due to the cheap deaths

Pub. 0-3 Entertainment **Dev.** The Behemoth **ESRB** T **MSRP** $29.99

RATING [●●●●○]

THE ORIGINAL

Point your browser at the sometimes-saucy original home of *Alien Hominid*, www.newgrounds.com and try the original Flash-based version.

GODZILLA: SAVE THE EARTH

BUT WHO WILL SAVE GODZILLA?

There's one thing that *Godzilla: Save the Earth* does really well, and that is re-creating the utter destruction that comes as a result of a 50-foot-tall lizard fighting an equally gigantic moth. It's quite satisfying to throw an enemy into a massive skyscraper, only to see the building collapse seconds later due to the impact of one of the several mighty beasts in this game. In fact, that's why the destruction-oriented fights are easily the most entertaining of the several types of levels available in the game—somehow, playing basketball (or in this case, picking up boulders and throwing them through a rim) just doesn't measure up to the thrill of kicking a big moth in the ass.

Sadly, the combat isn't all that great, either. Granted, it's kind of hard to gauge how a giant radioactive lizard would control if one were to actually exist, but that's no excuse for having combinations that are either ridiculously slow or don't actually happen until a second or so after you press the appropriate buttons. Additionally, throws can be a little difficult to execute simply because your character has some trouble keeping locked on to a certain opponent, which is particularly bothersome in multiplayer matches.

Still, Godzilla fans will more than likely dig some of the extras thrown into the game. For one, there are characters from just about every *Godzilla* film, including multiple versions of Godzilla himself and some other favorites, like Jet Jaguar, who is totally not Ultra Man. No, really. He's not Ultra Man. Also, there are extra stages as well as concept art showing a variety of different monsters from the *Godzilla* series. But none of this is really enough to overshadow the fact that *Save the Earth* is a sloppy fighting game that may be good for a few laughs and nothing more. « *Giancarlo Varanini*

PROS Large cast of characters, destroying cities is fun
CONS Controls are slow and awkward in multiplayer matches
JET JAGUAR is not Ultra Man, darn it!

Pub. Atari **Dev.** Pipeworks Software **ESRB** T **MSRP** $39.99

RATING [●●◐○○]

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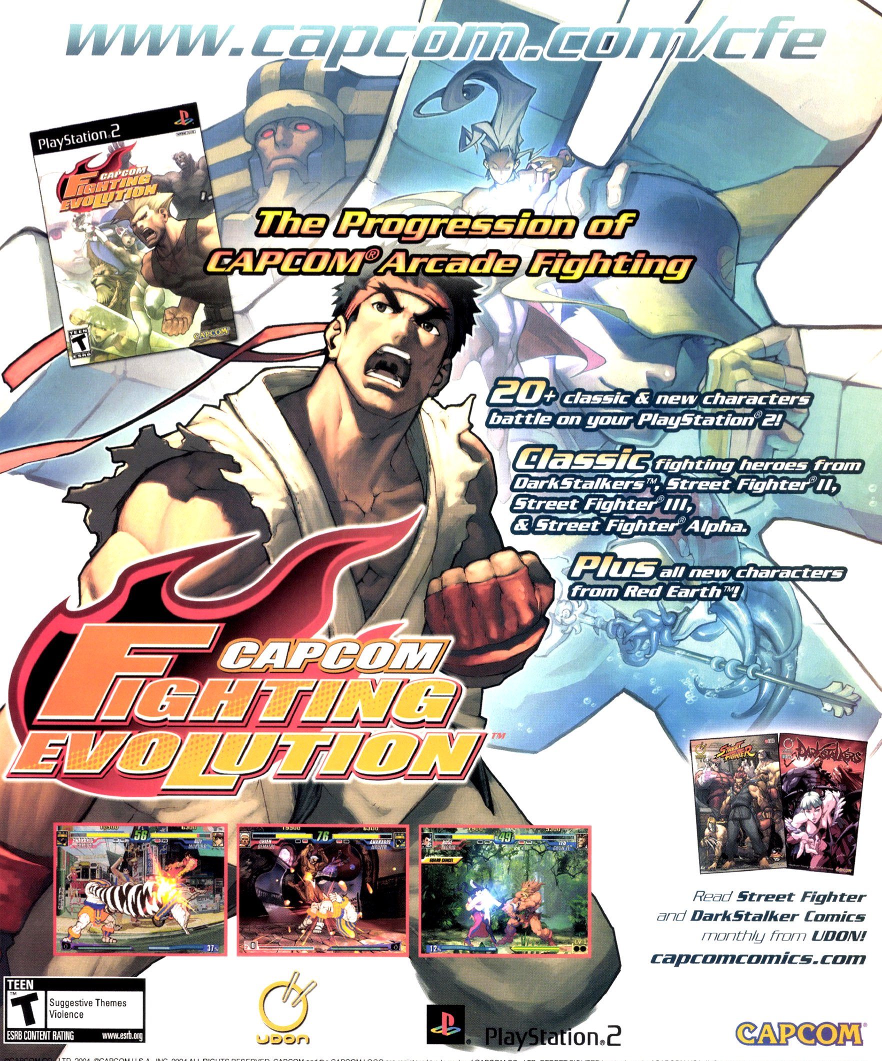

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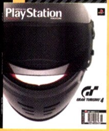

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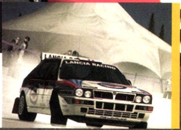

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SAMURAI WARRIORS: XTREME LEGENDS

KOEI'S MOST UNNECESSARY EXPANSION PACK YET

First there was *Dynasty Warriors 3: Xtreme Legends*. Then came *Dynasty Warriors 4: Xtreme Legends*. You can only imagine how xtreme the legends get with *Samurai Warriors: Xtreme Legends*! Unfortunately, if you have a realistic imagination, that's not very xtreme at all.

Whereas *Dynasty 3 XL* worked largely for its novelty alone and *Dynasty 4 XL* introduced some cool new gameplay modes, *Samurai XL* adds less than either. Only the most hardcore will appreciate much of anything added to this eighth *Warriors* release for PS2. For instance, versus mode includes three new competitive multiplayer games—which you'll never feel the need to play more than once. Survival mode introduces a gold-gathering mechanic—big deal. Meanwhile, the encyclopedia tells you more about the game's feudal-Japanese characters—a welcome addition, but nothing you'd buy a game for.

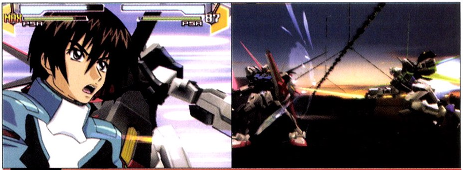
Once you get past the negligible new features, there *is* some fun hack-n-slash gameplay to be had with the four new characters. No single *Warriors* character has ever been as fun to use as Ina the archer warrior princess, and her father Tadakatsu Honda (yeah, the same dude you unlocked in *Onimusha 3*) is worth a test drive as the veritable Lu Bu of Japan.

But still…four characters? *Dynasty 3 XL* had seven to supplement a game that already had 40 warriors compared to *Samurai*'s 15. Would it have been so hard for Koei to have added these folks the first time? « Chris Baker

REVIEW HAIKU Four new characters / Make this worth a look for fans / But for no one else

Pub. Koei Dev. Omega Force ESRB T MSRP $29.99

RATING [●●●○○]



BATTLE ASSAULT 3

MEDIOCRE MECHA FOR MANGA NERDS

Disclosure: I'm not a fan of Gundam or any Adult Swim programming that originates in Japan. I have no giant robot fetishes, though I grew up on Transformers, Voltron, and Robotech. I actually prefer small robots, specifically ones that vacuum your floor, bring you drinks, or do impersonations of pets. I *am* a fighting-game fan, and I know a clunker when I see one. *Battle Assault 3* is almost, not quite, a clunker, existing in the space between serviceable and irritating.

For every positive, there are a couple of negatives. Fights are fast (and not at all what you'd expect from skyscraper tanks with legs), but they don't flow. At close range, the robots dispatch a few simple combos. From afar, they squeeze off gunfire at one another. Unfortunately, you spend most of your time in between, trying to get in close for a jab or a stab, or trying to pull away to blast a few rounds. Fights never build up momentum, starting and stopping, usually ending in anticlimactic laser fire. You can rumble with up to four fighters at once, which accelerates the action. But switching your focus between opponents is not as smooth as it needs to be, often leaving you pounding on a button while an untargeted foe gets in cheap shots.

Given the popularity of Gundam models, I'm guessing fans will want this for the 33 playable suits. Well, they're in here, though they don't play very differently from one another. For the hardcore, I officially stamp *Battle Assault 3* "not a disaster" and "slightly funnish." « Robert Ashley

VOLTRON Fast fights, four-robot rumbles
POWER RANGERS Fights don't flow, those Gundams play very similarly to each other

Pub. Bandai Dev. Bandai ESRB T MSRP $39.99

RATING [●●◐○○]

HUH?

Although *Vietcong* does include licensed music, "Purple Haze" isn't actually one of the tracks. It does have Hendrix's song "Hey Joe" as performed by Deep Purple, though, which is, uh, sort of…close?

SUPERIOR

If you're looking for some good giant-robot fighting and happen to have a Sega DreamCast, Capcom's overlooked *Tech Romancer* destroys *Battle Assault 3* in every possible way.

VIETCONG: PURPLE HAZE

'SCUSE ME WHILE I KILL THIS GUY

When I started playing ***Vietcong***, I was pleasantly surprised. "Hey," I thought, "this is actually pretty good for a $10 game!" Then I discovered it's *not* a $10 game. It's funny how much of an impact 30 dollars can have on your perception of quality.

For $10, I'd be willing to ignore the ridiculously long load times. I'd be willing to ignore the horrendous A.I., which causes enemies to wander aimlessly and teammates to relentlessly step directly into your line of fire—even going so far as to wedge themselves between you and the wall you're crouching behind. I'd be willing to ignore the overly sensitive controls, the exaggerated recoil that makes aiming doubly difficult, and the enemies' precise shooting that makes it clear they have none of these problems. And I'd certainly be willing to ignore the ultrasimple graphics (circa 1998), the horrendous animation, and the painfully bad sound effects.

All these complaints wouldn't carry nearly as much weight, which would allow the game's (admittedly few) strengths to stand out a bit. For example, consider the fact that this is a first-person shooter with truly interactive squad elements: You can issue separate commands to each of your teammates if you choose, or even walk up to them and interact with them directly—borrowing ammo, asking for health, that sort of thing. The game also has surprisingly careful pacing, which adds a certain degree of tension; running 'n' gunning will leave you stone-cold dead in a hurry, so you have to make each choice cautiously.

A $10 price tag could make *Vietcong* a diverting shooter for anyone who's looking for a quick fix of period combat. It wouldn't exactly make the game fun…but at least it wouldn't be painful. As it is now, though, I can't help but grimace every time I think about someone dropping 40 bucks on this thing. « Joe Rybicki

PROS True tactical control, plus online play
CONS No fun to play, watch, or listen to—oh, and good luck finding someone you can play against online

Pub. Gathering Dev. Illusion Softworks ESRB M MSRP $39.99

RATING [●◐○○○]

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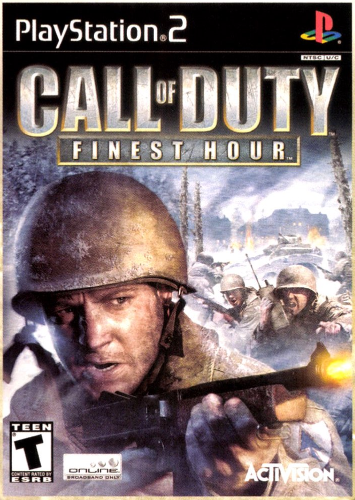

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RESIDENT EVIL: APOCALYPSE

(Milla Jovovich, Sienna Guillory)

WHO KNEW THAT EVIL RESIDED IN A DVD CASE? **by John Scalzi**

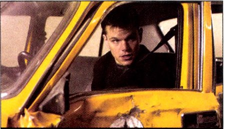
On the grand scale of Hollywood filmmakers, there are (in descending order) icons, legends, respected artists, journeymen, hacks, total hacks, and Paul W.S. Anderson. Anderson gets his own special level in filmmaking hell because not only is he an atrocious filmmaker, having pawned off such resolute effluvia as *Mortal Kombat,* the first *Resident Evil* film, and the outrageously inane *Alien vs. Predator,* but he's also a moderately successful atrocious filmmaker. This means that despite the general craptasticality of his craft, people still attend his films, and thereby he's given film studios no reason not to reward him with still more chances to commit heinous acts of film production. What makes it even worse is that his most financially successful films are based on or somehow related to videogames—which is to say the nascent genre of videogame films is keeping this man's career alive, even if he's not returning the favor by making his videogame-inspired films worth watching.

Which brings us to *Resident Evil: Apocalypse,* which Andersen did not direct (a job palmed off to longtime second unit director Alexander Witt) but did produce and "write," so trust me, he's still amply responsible. The film is an inchoate mess of action and zombies, which should come as no surprise since the first film in the series was exactly the same, and given that film's modest yet still unfathomable success, there was no reason to screw with the formula. This film finds Alice (Milla Jovovich) picking up where she left off in the first film, wandering about Raccoon City avoiding and/or shooting zombies; eventually she teams up with two other gals as sexy as she is to find a little girl who is the key to escaping the city before it and its zombie population gets nuked. Alas, my encapsulation here is far more sensibly arrayed than the actual film or plot, neither of which easily survives Anderson's scripting of events. Yes, it's fun to ogle Jovovich and costars Sienna Guillory and Sandrine Holt, but that's what Internet newsgroups are for.

Look, videogame movies have a problem as it is; namely, there's yet to be a genuinely good film based on a videogame. Some people would say that's because videogames don't offer much to go on plotwise, but we gamers know that's not true; we can all easily name six or seven games with great stories and plots. The problem lies partly with the filmmakers, who strip-mine the games for their built-in marketability and then simply assume gamers are beef-witted consumers with their money already out. But it also lies partly with gamers, since apparently sufficient numbers of us behave exactly in that manner, thereby reducing the chance that future films based on videogames will be worth seeing. People like Paul W.S. Anderson are responsible for making videogame movies such a damn waste of time, but gamers are responsible for supporting his slacktacular work at all.

Simply put: If we don't demand better movies based on videogames, we won't get them. We'll just keep getting this, over and over again. «

RATING [●○○○○]



THE BOURNE SUPREMACY

(Matt Damon, Joan Allen)

The thing I like about the *Bourne* movies is that they're superefficient action films—they run clean, move fast, and have action scenes drenched in such realism that you don't have much time to think to yourself, "Hey, I bet you in real life Matt Damon is a candyass who'd cry like a baby if he got himself into a slap fight." Here he's a smart hardass trying to figure out why the people he told to leave him alone just won't. Action films do get better than this, but not without actually being great.

RATING [●●●●○]

COLLATERAL

(Jamie Foxx, Tom Cruise)

There's a tremendous existential pleasure in watching Tom Cruise go bad. You get a grin from the first moment he pops up here with his frosted hair and snazzy suit; it's like watching that goody-goody kid from homeroom coming into class with a hickey the size of Delaware. Here, Cruise is a hit man who dragoons a hapless taxi driver (Jamie Foxx) into driving him around to his murders; the question becomes whether the taxi dude's going to make it through the night. Foxx does his part and more than holds his own (this is one of the two performances that are likely to get him to the Oscars this year, the other being his star turn as Ray Charles in *Ray*), but ultimately Cruise wins on points and style. Only a star who has been the good guy as long as Cruise has could flip to casual evil as convincingly as he does. He looks like he's having just too much fun.

RATING [●●●●◐]

I, ROBOT

(Will Smith, Bridget Moynahan)

This film enraged sci-fi geeks because it has almost nothing to do with the Asimov book it stole its title from. But this *I, Robot* is a perfectly cromulent bastardization: Will Smith is suitably Will Smith–like as a Chicago cop with a grudge against robots, who—surprise!—eventually prove that Will was right not to trust them, and director Alex Proyas provides lots of nicely done sci-fi action scenes. Does Asimov deserve a more faithful adaptation? Sure. But this is the one he got.

RATING [●●●◐○]

KING ARTHUR

(Clive Owen, Keira Knightley)

This ridiculous revision of the King Arthur story (Arthur is a Roman mercenary, Guinevere is the ass-kicking Queen of the Woads) purports to be based on the "true" story of Arthur, which I suppose it is, if by "true" you mean "made up in the fetid, ahistorical imagination of a screenwriter." On the other hand, this silliness does let us see a buffed-out Keira Knightly, Clive Owen makes a reasonably cool Arthur, and the action plays out like *Braveheart* lite, so you won't be entirely unentertained.

RATING [●●●○○]

DVD RELEASES

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December 14, 2004
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I, Robot
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King Arthur
The Manchurian Candidate
Napoleon Dynamite
Shaun of the Dead
The Simpsons: Season 5

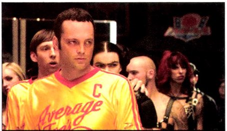
December 28, 2004
Anchorman: The Legend of Ron Burgundy
Garden State
King of the Hill: Season 3
Open Water
Resident Evil: Apocalypse

THE MANCHURIAN CANDIDATE

(Denzel Washington, Meryl Streep)

This film works a lot better if you've seen the original 1962 version, so you can see how this new version updates to today's world. With that context, you'll see a sly, smart reinvention; without it, this film can be confusing, with a plot involving brainwashing, the Gulf War, and political candidates bought and sold by the highest bidder. Even without the original version, however, this is well worth catching for the excellent performances by Denzel Washington, Liev Schreiber, and Meryl Streep.

RATING [●●●●○]



DODGEBALL: A TRUE UNDERDOG STORY

(Ben Stiller, Vince Vaughn)

God, this is a stupid movie, and you have to understand that this is meant as a compliment. Vince Vaughn plays a slacker health club owner who is about to lose his business; Ben Stiller is the overpumped rival gym owner who has his eye on Vince's property. This flick wants nothing more than to be idiotic and make you laugh, and since it does both, it's hard to complain about it. And it makes you want to play dodgeball again, at least until you remember what being hit in the ear was like.

RATING [●●●◐○]

GARDEN STATE

(Zach Braff, Natalie Portman)

This film has been overpraised, mostly because writer/director/star Zach Braff is known as a sitcom actor and is therefore not credited for having a brain, and because it features Natalie Portman in a film where she's not spouting George Lucas' deadly prose, thus reminding us that she can act. Give these factors their due consideration, and you've got another film in which a schmoe (Braff) goes home to quirky friends and family arguments and discovers it's nice to be liked by a nice girl (Portman). Well, yeah.

RATING [●●●○○]

OPEN WATER

(Daniel Travis, Blanchard Ryan)

Also known as "The Blair Shark Project," this little indie movie is a character study of two yuppies accidentally left at sea by their tour boat—and then the sharks come. What gives this film an extra thrill is that it was actually shot on open water, and the sharks you see in the film are real. Yeeek. Does it make for an excellent film? Well, no, but you have to give credit to the stars (and the film crew) for being insane enough to use live killing machines as a cheap special effect.

RATING [●●●○○]

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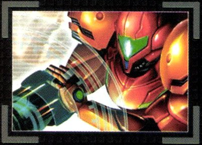
☒ >The Sims 2

☒ >Halo 2

☒ >Half-Life 2



☒ >Metroid Prime 2

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GTA: SA

15 QUICK TIPS TO HELP YOU WIN

PARTNERSHIP WITH PRIMA
Prima Games, leading publisher of gaming guides, provides *OPM* with top-of-the-line strategies every month.

In this issue, Prima's strategy gurus share their expertise on some of the best *Killzone* multiplayer maps. Trust us, these guys know their stuff.

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SAN ANDREAS

MAKE YOUR LIFE EASIER, BEAT THE GAME MORE QUICKLY

01 TOOL UP EARLY

Take the path that runs along the right-hand side of Sweet's house. There are two bridges behind it. Under the one to your right, you'll find a micro SMG, and under the bridge to your left, you'll find some body armor.

02 WEAR A LOT OF GREEN

To build respect early in the game (especially during the first six or seven hours), make sure you wear your gang's colors. If you're not wearing green, it'll be difficult for you to build trust with the other gang members. Early on, your colors are more important than your sex appeal, so buy a green shirt and maybe a hat.

03 STAMINA = HEALTH

Ride a bicycle or run as much as you can early in the game. Your stamina and your health are linked, so the fitter you become, the bigger your health bar will be. This process starts very early on and grows rapidly over the first 10 hours of gameplay. To make your health bar grow more quickly, hit the stationary bike at the gym.

04 GRAB A TAXI

The first thing to do any time you encounter a new area is snag a taxicab (or a fire truck or an ambulance) and complete some optional missions. This is a great way to build up cash in a hurry and learn the lay of the land. Later in the game, you'll encounter trucker missions, which you should take immediately—they are incredibly lucrative, and they provide a methodical approach to learning the best routes through the San Andreas countryside.

05 MARK A WAYPOINT

Use the waypoint tag on the map by hitting the Circle button to mark a location. This is a useful way to mark a turning point on a long journey (especially helpful out in the country) or mark the gym or a favorite store.

06 FLY THE FORBIDDEN SKIES

You're not supposed to be able to fly around San Andreas until you've gone through the paces and earned a pilot's license. In fact, if you go into Easter Bay International Airport outside San Fierro, you'll find that the planes are locked up tight. But you can actually take to the skies before you complete your first mission—head down to Los Santos International and look for the section of exterior wall without chain-link fencing. If you park a car in front of the wall and hop on the hood, you can use CJ's handy climbing skills to scramble over the top of it and then jack a Dodo...or a speedy Shamal. If you fly out of Los Santos airspace, expect the heat to come down on you with four-star fury and put a quick end to your aerial escapades. But the Shamal is fast enough to get you to Las Venturas to do some gambling before the long arm of the law puts you in a choke hold.

07 INVESTMENT OF A LIFETIME

It's entirely likely that nothing in the entire game is as annoying as losing a race and being forced to return all the way to the start. Save yourself the hassle by buying property near the starting point of a race so you can save and immediately reload if you screw up too badly. Ten thousand imaginary dollars is a small price to pay for the comfort of not having to drive halfway across the state. The good news is that there's already a convenient save point for one of the races: Simply save the game at the cabin in Fern Ridge that belongs to Cesar's cousin—it's a short drive to your goal from there.

08 BEEFCAKE

There are at least six women in San Andreas looking for love, but don't think you can just walk up to them and sweep them off their feet; these ladies are picky. Denise you meet as a matter of course, thanks to that bastard Tenpenny. The rest you'll have to meet on your own in out-of-the-way places...and to win their hearts, you'll need to meet their distinctive physical tastes. The lady at the San Fierro drivers' school only digs fatties, while the girl at Ammo-nation in Blueberry has a thing for "average" guys. If you want to be a true player, you'll have to woo them all. Our advice is to go for the Las Venturas lady who's into muscular guys last—it's easy to conform to most other tastes, but muscle mass is harder to get rid of than fat.

09 MAKE FLYING EASIER

To make flying planes easier, switch the camera to the first-person view. This is particularly handy when piloting the more sensitive aircraft, like the WWII fighters and the biplanes. Private jets and helicopters are a little easier to control, but the old stuff is much more sensitive to the game's physics engine. Also, remember to be subtle. Don't fumble with the stick if you need to adjust only a little. More often than not, a light touch on the rudder (L2 and R2) is all you need to correct your route.

10 CHASE ME!

Chase missions are tough. Whether you're gathering police bikes for the Caligula's Palace job or tracking couriers for Zero, they're all hard missions. What's the key? Use the map. You're not going to beat these missions just by tracking the dots on the radar—you need to keep flipping to the map to track the route of each target. For the police bike mission in particular, you also need to remember that the truck runs around the perimeter of Las Venturas clockwise, so if you're on the opposite side of town, move along the perimeter road in a counterclockwise direction.

11 TRY PARACHUTING EARLY

Technically speaking, CJ isn't supposed to be able to go parachuting through the skies of San Andreas until he has a pilot's license. But what kind of goon thinks *GTA* games are about playing by the rules? As usual, Rockstar has slipped a back door into the game for those who care to hunt it down, which means that you can do base jumping right from the beginning. Head to downtown Los Santos and look for a tall building with a circular design (it's just southwest of the Mulholland Intersection). Enter where you see a yellow marker to climb to the roof, where a parachute will be waiting for you. Now, take a flying jump...just don't forget to pull the rip cord before it's too late. There's also a parachute atop the big pyramid skyscraper across from the hotel where you can run valet missions in San Fierro. The entrance isn't marked, but you can still reach the roof by ducking in the door.

12 AIM MANUALLY

Head shots are invariably instant kills, but you can't do them if you rely on the autotargeting system. If you can, aim manually.

13 TURF WARS MADE EASY

Even though the first salvo of your turf war is launched in the park to the northwest of Los Santos, the best place to begin your offensive in earnest is on the beaches to the south and around Grove Street. The Ballas there are a bunch of softies, frequently walking around unarmed or with puny baseball bats and pistols. The gangs near the docks to the north are quite a bit tougher, generally equipped with SMGs and assault rifles. And don't even think about taking over any yellow areas until you've got a substantial entourage—the Mexican Vagos gang members who control the city's eastern portions are bad dudes. Jumping into the war at your first opportunity has two positive effects. First, it'll very quickly help you attain a hitman rating with a number of weapons, and second, it will save you some time when you finally get to the final few hours of the entire game.

14 GANG WAR PICK-UPS

Health and body armor pick-ups appear randomly between each gang-war wave, usually at the perimeter of the war zone but generally not too far from CJ. Once you spot the pick-ups, try to plan your strategy around easy access to them in case things start to go downhill for you. Whatever you do, avoid letting the pick-ups become surrounded by foes.

15 LET THEM COME TO YOU

If you go charging into a war zone and let yourself get surrounded, you're screwed. The best way to win is to let the bad guys come to you. You'll probably notice that gang-war enemies always appear in three waves and that each wave consists of two groups that appear from two different locations, usually on opposite sides of CJ. Your best bet is to move to the perimeter of the active war zone between waves and run to the center once the new batch of baddies appears, staying perpendicular to them. This will force them to come to you, which they'll obligingly do in single-file fashion. Then it's just a matter of crouching in place, preferably with a bit of cover, and picking them off one at a time. The submachine gun is the ideal tool for this. It has a great lock-on range, powerful shots, and a formidable rate of fire.

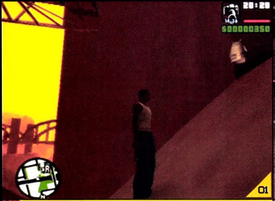
NEED WEAPONS?

Enter the following without pausing.

Weapon set 1
R1, R2, L1, R2, Left, Down, Right, Up, Left, Down, Right, Up

Weapon set 2
R1, R2, L1, R2, Left, Down, Right, Up, Left, Down, Down, Left

Weapon set 3
R1, R2, L1, R2, Left, Down, Right, Up, Left, Down, Down, Down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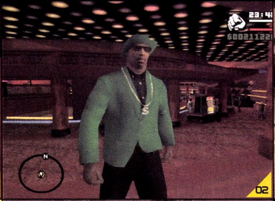

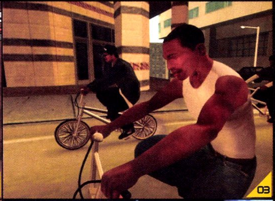

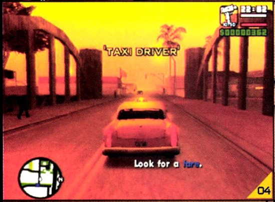
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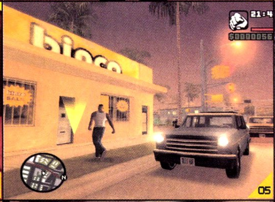

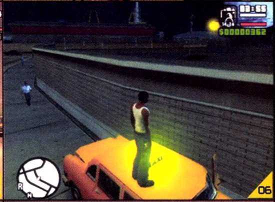
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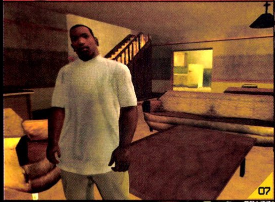

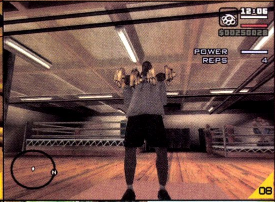
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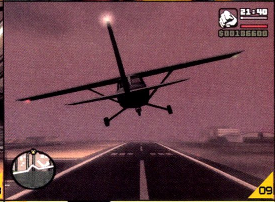
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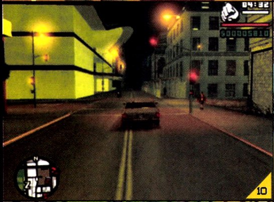
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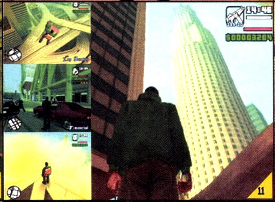
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BUILDING SAN ANDREAS

SO, HOW MANY PEOPLE DOES IT TAKE TO BUILD A GAME THAT BIG?

“My knowledge of the game in its entirety is no longer what it once was,” muses Dan Houser, Rockstar’s creative director. “No one person can possibly know everything there is to know about the game while you’re piecing it together because there’s just so much of it. I think I have a handle on most of it, but we divided the team into units that looked after things like races, the overall world, character development, and things like that.” So, just how big is the team? “There were about 75 guys in Scotland,” Houser says, “but it didn’t really start off that big. Some of the guys were working on other stuff, like *Manhunt*, but by the end, yes, there were about 75 there, and then another 15 or so of us in New York. Then, of course, there were all the testers. It all used to be much smaller, you know.”

“Actually, we had an enormous number of testers working on this game,” he beams. “There were something like 60, 80, and later 100 guys checking and balancing the game to make it work.”

Now that it’s done, Houser ponders what the *San Andreas* team’s biggest achievement was. “For me, I think the stuff that we worked the hardest on was the stuff that you don’t necessarily notice. I know that sounds silly, but it’s true. It’s about the breadth and the depth. It’s not just the size of the world, it’s not just that it takes so long to get from one side to the other, it’s also that you can walk up to a soda machine and get a drink out of it, no matter where you see one. We worked really hard on things like the pedestrians speaking to one another. In the previous games, you could run around and there would be all these people around, but there wasn’t much going on. This time around, you can just sit back and watch all the freaks interact with each other. Occasionally, you’ll see that they just don’t like each other and they’ll even start to fight. We’re still scratching the surface of every pedestrian having a ‘life’ in a virtual world, rather than just having them cruise around a gameplay environment.”

Last month, when we asked Dan’s brother, Rockstar President Sam Houser, about the future of the franchise, he responded, “If we didn’t have to top it, what would be the point?” before going on to concede that, “This is the trilogy for now, and we’re not in a rush to do the next one.” Is everyone in agreement on that? “That’s what he said, is it?” Dan Houser asks. “Well, when we started *GTA3*, the first year was spent just making the city work, and only then did we set about making the story. It was around that point that we really got an inkling of what this meant for us in the bigger sense and we started to think about the future. We already had some ideas penciled in for *Vice*, and then in even fainter pencil I think we knew where we had to end up with *San Andreas*. We knew where we wanted the story to go, and we wanted the whole thing to be a very loosely bonded trilogy. It had to be three different interconnected stories. We didn’t want some sort of ultimate bad guy, and any crossover between the games had to be stuff that made sense. We didn’t want references to previous games to scare anyone off with *San Andreas*. I love the Claude and Catalina scene and the fact that Catalina has such a significant part in the new game. We had some fun with the way we developed her character, but the reason we chose her was because she was the perfect fit for those scenes in the Badlands. I think it turned out well having her be sort of a sympathetic character in *San Andreas* after seeing her as the ultimate bad guy in *GTA3*.”

Catalina is a good example of how the team’s approach to humor differed throughout the trilogy. Look back at *GTA3* now, and it’s nowhere near as a rich an experience as *San Andreas* is in terms of character interaction or script. “A lot of that conservatism is because Claude didn’t speak,” Houser concedes. “It’s difficult to make things funny when your hero is mute and you have all of the supporting characters just jabbering away. It wasn’t just the voices, either—we’ve made some advances with the motion capture in the game, too; it’s much more refined now.

“If you look back at *GTA3* and *Vice City* and think about the most cinematic moments, they were missions like those in *Vice* where you’re in the helicopter chatting with Lance that really had that movie feel to them. Everyone on the team wanted to take that stuff and expand on it, and you’ll notice in *San Andreas* that there’s a lot more of that kind of thing. If you play some of the set pieces, like the car chases in the Los Santos scenes, you’ll notice that they say different stuff to one another. Also, some of the missions where it’s just Carl and Cesar, you’ll hear them say all kinds of stuff to each other.” With all of that chat, how much time was spent on the recording sessions? “I was pretty much locked in a studio for five months,” Houser groans. “It was definitely worth it, though, don’t you think? Now that it’s done, I think it’s clear that one of our limitations is the media itself. We were really fighting what you can squeeze onto a DVD. In fact, for the whole game, we were definitely using all of the power of the PS2. We’re right up against the edge of what it’s capable of.” «

> “WE WANTED THE WHOLE THING TO BE A LOOSELY BONDED TRILOGY.”

PS2 TRICKS AND REVIEW ARCHIVE

Game names in black bars indicate a Greatest Hits title. Names in yellow indicate a score of 5 out of 5. ⚡ indicates the game supports online play.

GAME	PUBLISHER	SCORE	ISSUE
.hack//INFECTION	Bandai	●●●◖	65
.hack//MUTATION	Bandai	●●●●	69
.hack//OUTBREAK	Bandai	●●●●	73
.hack//QUARANTINE	Bandai	●●●●	76
18 Wheeler American Pro Trucker	Acclaim	●●●●	52
4x4 EVO	GOD Games	●●●●	44
2002 FIFA World Cup	EA Sports	●●●●	58
Ace Combat 04: Shattered Skies	**Namco**	●●●●◖	**51**
Ace Combat 5: The Unsung War	Namco	●●●●	87
Activision Anthology	Activision	●●●●	64
Aero Elite: Combat Academy	Sega	●●●	67
The Adventures of Cookie & Cream	Agetec	●●●◖	44
Aggressive Inline	Acclaim	●●●●◖	59
Airblade	Namco	●●●●	53
Airforce Delta Strike	Konami	●●●	78
Alias	Acclaim	●●◖	81
Aliens Versus Predator: Extinction	EA Games	●●●◖	72
All-Star Baseball 2002	Acclaim	●●●◖	44
All-Star Baseball 2003	Acclaim	●●●◖	56
All-Star Baseball 2004	Acclaim	●●●	67
⚡All-Star Baseball 2005	Acclaim	●●◖	80
Alter Echo	THQ	●●	73
American Idol	Codemasters	●	77
⚡Amplitude	Sony CEA	●●●●	68
Antz Extreme Racing	Empire	●◖	61
Ape Escape 2	Ubisoft	●●●●◖	70
Aqua Aqua	3DO	●●	42
Arc the Lad: Twilight of the Spirits	Sony CEA	●●●●	70
Arctic Thunder	Midway	●	50
Armored Core 2	Agetec	●●●	39
Armored Core 2: Another Age	Agetec	●●●◖	48
Armored Core 3	Agetec	●●●◖	61
Armored Core: Nexus	Agetec	●●	85
Army Men: Air Attack	3DO	●●●◖	44
Army Men: Green Rogue	3DO	●●	45
Army Men RTS	3DO	●●●●	56
Army Men: Sarge's Heroes 2	3DO	●●◖	45
Asterix & Obelix Kick Buttix	Atari	●●◖	85
Astro Boy	Sega	●●●	85
Athens 2004	Sony CEA	●●◖	83
ATV Offroad Fury	**Sony CEA**	●●●●	**42**
⚡ ATV Offroad Fury 2	**Sony CEA**	●●●●	**64**
ATV Quad Power Racing 2	Acclaim	●●●●	66
⚡Auto Modellista	Capcom	●●◖	69
Backyard Baseball	Atari	●●◖	81
Backyard Wrestling: Don't Try This at Home	Eidos	●●◖	75
Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance	**Interplay**	●●●●◖	**52**
Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance II	Interplay	●●●◖	77
Barbarian	Titus	●●	57
The Bard's Tale	Vivendi Universal	●●●●◖	86
Bass Strike Virtual Fishing Tournament	THQ	●◖	51
Batman: Rise of Sin Tzu	Ubisoft	●●	74
Batman: Vengeance	Ubisoft	●●●	51
Battle Engine Aquila	Atari	●●●◖	65
Battlestar Galactica	Vivendi Universal	●●●	76
Beyond Good & Evil	Ubisoft	●●●●	75
Big Mutha Truckers	Empire	●●●	71
Bionicle: The Game	EA Games	●●◖	75
Black & Bruised	Majesco	●●●●	67
Blade II	Activision	●●	62
Blood Omen 2	Eidos	●●●◖	57
BloodRayne	Majesco	●●●◖	63
BloodRayne 2	Majesco	●●●●◖	87
Blood Will Tell	Sega	●●●●	87
Bloody Roar 3	Activision	●●●◖	47
Bloody Roar 4	Konami	●	75
Blowout	Majesco	●●●	77
BMX XXX	Acclaim	●◖	65

GAME	PUBLISHER	SCORE	ISSUE
Bombastic	Capcom	●●◖	72
Breath of Fire: Dragon Quarter	Capcom	●●●●	67
Britney's Dance Beat	THQ	●●●●	58
The Bouncer	Square EA	●●●	42
Buffy the Vampire Slayer: Chaos Bleeds	Sierra/Fox	●●●◖	73
Bujingai: The Forsaken City	Bam	●●●●	82
Burnout	Acclaim	●●●●◖	52
Burnout 2: Point of Impact	Acclaim	●●●●	63
⚡Burnout 3: Takedown	**EA Games**	●●●●●	**85**

Curious as to what happens when you get gold on every crash course? How about completing all the signature takedowns? Browse through the following to get the scoop on the goodies these tasks reward.

EXTRA CARS

Custom Coupe Ultimate	Get all gold on every crash course
Oval Racer Special	Get every signature takedown
Trash Truck	Accumulate $90 million in crash mode

Butt-Ugly Martians: Zoom or Doom!	Crave	●●	73
Cabela's Big Game Hunter	**Activision**	●●◖	**67**
Cabela's Dangerous Hunts	**Activision**	●●◖	**76**
Cabela's Deer Hunt 2004 Season	Activision	●●◖	74
Cabela's Deer Hunt 2005 Season	Activision	●●●●◖	85
Capcom vs. SNK 2	Capcom	●●●●◖	51
Carmen Sandiego: The Secret of the Stolen Drums	Bam	●●◖	77
CART Fury	Midway	●	47
Casper: Spirit Dimensions	TDK Mediactive	●●◖	50
Castlevania: Lament of Innocence	Konami	●●●●	74
The Cat in the Hat	Vivendi Universal	●●	76
Catwoman	EA Games	●	84
⚡Champions of Norrath: Realms of EverQuest	Sony Online	●●●●◖	78
Chaos Legion	Capcom	●●●◖	70
⚡Chessmaster	Ubisoft	●●●◖	70
Choplifter: Crisis Shield	Xicat	●●●	69
ChoroQ	Atlus	●●●◖	86
City Crisis	Take-Two	●●●	48
Clock Tower 3	Capcom	●●●	68
Combat Elite: WWII Paratroopers	Acclaim	●●●	83
Colin McRae Rally 3	**Codemasters**	●●●●●	**68**
Commandos 2: Men of Courage	Eidos	●●	62
Conflict: Desert Storm	**Gotham Games**	●◖	**63**
Conflict: Desert Storm II	Gotham Games	●●●	74
Conflict: Vietnam	Global Star	●●◖	86
Conflict Zone	Ubisoft	●●◖	63
Contra: Shattered Soldier	Konami	●●●●◖	64
Corvette	Global Star	●●●◖	81
Cool Boarders 2001	Sony CEA	●●●●	46
Crash Bandicoot: The Wrath of Cortex	**Universal**	●●●◖	**51**
⚡Crash 'N' Burn	Eidos	●●	87
Crash Nitro Kart	**Vivendi Universal**	●●●◖	**76**
Crash Twinsanity	Vivendi Universal	●●◖	86
Crazy Taxi	**Acclaim**	●●●●	**46**
Crimson Sea 2	Koei	●●●◖	80
Crimson Tears	Capcom	●●●◖	83
Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon	Ubisoft	●●	74
Culdcept	SNK	●●●◖	75
Dark Angel: Vampire Apocalypse	Metro3D	●◖	49
Dark Cloud	**Sony CEA**	●●●●◖	**46**
Dark Cloud 2	**Sony CEA**	●●●●●	**66**
Dark Summit	THQ	●●●◖	52
Dave Mirra Freestyle BMX 2	**Acclaim**	●●●◖	**50**
DDR Extreme	Konami	●●●●	85
DDRMAX	Konami	●●●●	63
DDRMAX 2	Konami	●●●●	74
Dead or Alive 2: Hardcore	Tecmo	●●●●◖	39
Dead to Rights	**Namco**	●●●	**65**
Def Jam Vendetta	**EA Sports Big**	●●●●	**67**
Def Jam Fight for NY	**EA Games**	●●●●◖	**85**

Why you would want to cheat in a game where you get to scrape an opponent's face along a chain-link fence is beyond us. But if you really feel the need, here is a code that will hook you up with a few extra reward points.

Reward Points

Go into the Cheats menu and enter all of these passwords.

NEWJACK	100 reward points
THESOURCE	100 reward points
CROOKLYN	100 reward points
DUCKETS	100 reward points
GETSTUFF	100 reward points

WORST GAME EVER?

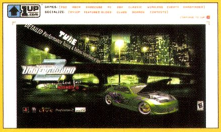
For a while we thought *Catwoman* was going to be the biggest gaming atrocity of the year, but that same month (Issue #84) we were shocked to see an even worse game, *McFarlane's Evil Prophecy* from Konami. It has the honor of being one of our lowest scoring games ever!

GAME	PUBLISHER	SCORE	ISSUE
Defender	Midway	●●●◖	62
⚡Destruction Derby Arenas	Gathering	●●◖	80
Deus Ex: The Conspiracy	Eidos	●●●●◖	56
Devil May Cry	**Capcom**	●●●●●	**50**
Devil May Cry 2	**Capcom**	●●●	**66**
Digital Hitz Factory	XS Games	●●●●	76
Dino Stalker	Capcom	●●●◖	61
Disaster Report	Agetec	●●●◖	65
Disgaea: Hour of Darkness	Atlus	●●●●	72
Disney Golf	EA Games	●●●●	61
Disney's Extreme Skate Adventure	Activision	●●●●	73
Disney's PK: Out of the Shadows	Ubisoft	●●◖	63
Disney's Treasure Planet	Sony CEA	●●●◖	64
A Dog's Life	Hip Interactive	●●	84
Donald Duck: Goin' Quackers	Ubisoft	●●●◖	42
Downforce	Titus	●●	57
Downhill Domination	Sony CEA	●●●●	71
Dr. Muto	Midway	●●◖	63
Dragon Ball Z: Budokai	**Atari**	●●●◖	**65**
Dragon Ball Z: Budokai 2	**Atari**	●●◖	**76**
Dragon Rage	3DO	●◖	54
Drakan: The Ancients' Gates	Sony CEA	●●●●	53
Drakengard	Square Enix USA	●●	78
DRIV3R	Atari	●●●◖	83
Driven	Bam	●	52
Driving Emotion Type-S	Square EA	●●◖	41
Drome Racers	EA Games	●●◖	64
Dropship	Bam	●●●●	57
Dual Hearts	Atlus	●●●	61
Dukes of Hazzard: Return of the General Lee	Ubisoft	●●●◖	87
Dynasty Tactics	Koei	●●●●◖	61
Dynasty Tactics 2	Koei	●●●●	74
Dynasty Warriors 2	Koei	●●●●	38
Dynasty Warriors 3	Koei	●●●●	52
Dynasty Warriors 3: Xtreme Legends	Koei	●●●◖	65
Dynasty Warriors 4	Koei	●●●●◖	68
Dynasty Warriors 4: Xtreme Legends	Koei	●●●◖	75
Dynasty Warriors 4: Empires	**Koei**	●●●●	**85**
Ecco the Dolphin: Defender of the Future	Acclaim	●●◖	56
Echo Night: Beyond	Agetec	●●●	84
Egg Mania: Eggstreme Madness	Kemco	●●◖	61
⚡eJay Clubworld	Crave	●●	73
Endgame	Empire	●●	59
Enter the Matrix	**Atari**	●●●	**71**
Ephemeral Fantasia	Konami	●◖	49
Escape from Monkey Island	**LucasArts**	●●●●●	**46**
⚡ESPN College Hoops	ESPN Videogames	●●●◖	76
ESPN International Track & Field	Konami	●●●	39
ESPN International Winter Sports 2002	Konami	●●●●	54
⚡ESPN Major League Baseball	ESPN Videogames	●●●◖	80
ESPN MLS Extra Time	Konami	●●	44
ESPN National Hockey Night	Konami	●◖	45
ESPN NBA 2Night	Konami	●●	42
ESPN NBA 2Night 2002	Konami	●●●	56
⚡ESPN NBA 2K5	ESPN Videogames	●●●●	87
⚡ESPN NBA Basketball	**ESPN Videogames**	●●●●●	**75**
⚡ESPN NFL Football	ESPN Videogames	●●●●◖	72
⚡ESPN NHL Hockey	ESPN Videogames	●●●●◖	73
⚡ESPN NHL 2K5	ESPN Videogames	●●●●◖	85
ESPN Winter X Games Snowboarding	Konami	●●●	41
ESPN Winter X Games Snowboarding 2002	Konami	●●●	53
ESPN X Games Skateboarding	Konami	●●●●	49
Eternal Ring	Agetec	●●	38
Eve of Extinction	Eidos	●●◖	56
Everblue 2	Capcom	●●●	66
Evergrace	Agetec	●●	39
⚡EverQuest Online Adventures	Sony Online	●●◖	66
⚡EverQuest Online Adventures: Frontiers	Sony Online	●●●◖	77
Evil Dead: A Fistful of Boomstick	THQ	●●●	70
Evil Twin	Ubisoft	●●	52
Evolution Skateboarding	Konami	●●◖	63
Evolution Snowboarding	Konami	●	65
Extermination	Sony CEA	●●◖	48
Extreme-G III	Acclaim	●●●●	50
EyeToy: AntiGrav	Sony CEA	●●●●◖	87
EyeToy: Groove	Sony CEA	●●●●◖	80
F1 2001	**EA Sports**	●●●●●	**52**
F1 2002	EA Sports	●●●●◖	60

1UP.COM THIS MONTH

1UP.COM

Did you devour your *OPM* in one sitting but still feel yourself jonesing for an update on the latest gaming news? Well, you're in luck—1UP.com has new content every day to fill that gaping void in your life.



OPM.1UP.COM

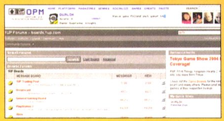
The *Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine* homepage. Come here for all the extra bits that we couldn't fit into the magazine.

PS2.1UP.COM

Everything PS2 from all of the Ziff Davis Media Game Group publications, including *Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine, Electronic Gaming Monthly, GMR,* and 1UP.com.

RACING.1UP.COM

It's as if 1UP was shoved kicking and screaming through a racing-game filter that removed all of the site's extraneous nonracing content.



BOARDS.1UP.COM

Got an opinion about a game? Just post it on the handy-dandy 1UP boards and you're guaranteed to get flak not only about that opinion but also about everything else in your life, from your body aroma to your parentage.

CLUBS.1UP.COM

You might have a preference for fighting games. Perhaps your affinity lies with Japanese import games. Or you could just like anything that tastes like chicken. Whatever your tastes, there's a club here for you.

HOME
PLATFORMS
MA
WE KNOW GAMERS
Scooter
Score: 2465
Rank: Lurker
NEED FOR SPEED

FEATURED CLUB

racingclub-club.1up.com

For those of you who feel the need to express your enthusiasm for *Gran Turismo 4* or, indeed, air your grievances as to its delays and omissions, this is a community you'll fit right in with. Everyone here loves cars and bikes, and driving them really fast.

107 Jimmy Neutron: Attack of the Twonkies
107 SD Gundam Force: Showdown
107 Sitting Ducks
107 Ty the Tasmanian Tiger 2: Bush Rescue
107 Yu Yu Hakusho: Dark Tournament
107 Yu-Gi-Oh!: Capsule Monster Coliseum
108 Viewtiful Joe 2
109 Capcom Fighting Evolution
109 King of Fighters 02/03
109 Mega Man X8
110 Dragon Ball Z: Budokai 3
110 Growlanser Generations
110 Scaler
111 ATV Offroad Fury 3
111 Gretzky NHL 2005
111 Outlaw Golf 2
112 Prince of Persia: Warrior Within
116 Alien Hominid
116 Godzilla: Save the Earth
118 Battle Assault 3
118 Samurai Warriors: Xtreme Legends
118 Vietcong: Purple Haze
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REPLAY

124 GTA: SAN ANDREAS
15 tips on winning faster.

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Dan Houser on the biggest PS2 game ever.

128 SOCOM II: LIBERATION
The new map—available only in *OPM*.

130 KILLZONE
Running and gunning in the war zone.

132 NEED FOR BURNOUT
Burnout 3 faces off against *NFSU2*.

134 RATCHET & CLANK: UYA
Maps, maps, and more maps.

136 THE SPORTS GUY
The best deal in videogames.

REWIND

146 FIVE YEARS AGO...
We were covering the same games.

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111 Outlaw Golf 2
106 The Polar Express
106 Power Rangers: Dino Thunder
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96 Rumble Roses
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105 SpongeBob SquarePants: The Movie
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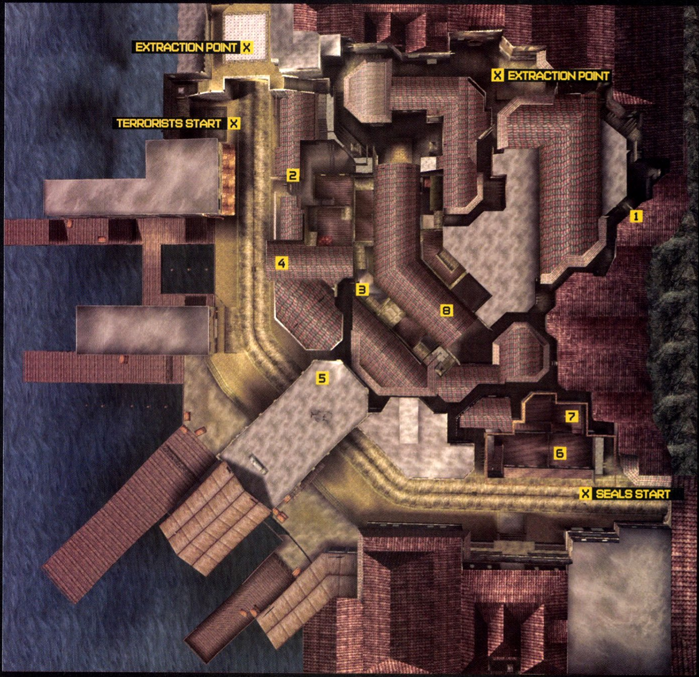
107 Ty the Tasmanian Tiger 2: Bush Rescue
102 The Urbz: Sims in the City
118 Vietcong: Purple Haze
108 Viewtiful Joe 2
96 WWE Smackdown! vs. Raw
107 Yu-Gi-Oh!: Capsule Monster Coliseum
107 Yu Yu Hakusho: Dark Tournament

SOCOM II: LIBERATION

THE INS AND OUTS OF THIS CONVOLUTED NEW MAP



You're holding in your hands the second of *OPM*'s three exclusive new *SOCOM II* maps, packed lovingly onto the demo disc in the middle of the magazine. But before you hop online with this all-new escort level, we thought we'd share with you some general tips to help make your experience just a little bit brighter.

1 This is a door. It opens and shuts via a switch on the terrorists' side. It's a strong metal door; it can't be blown up or forced open. This makes it perhaps the most important point on the entire map. You see, this door effectively blocks the quickest path from the SEALs' insertion point to the closer of the two extraction points. If the SEALs get there first with VIPs in tow, they stand a good chance of making it to the extraction point just around the corner. If the terrorists get there first to close the door—or, say, mine it—they will force the SEALs to escort the VIPs by a much more visible route. You'll find other doors at **2** and **3** that also aid in restricting the SEALs to the main road, but neither door is as effective as this one.

4 This rooftop vantage point is particularly useful for terrorists—it provides a good field of view down the main road (especially helpful if you've blocked off many of the alternate paths) and allows you to effectively lob grenades down the neighboring alleyways. You can also get a scoped view of anyone hiding out on **5**.

5 This broad rooftop isn't as useful as it may seem. Sure, SEALs can snipe any terrorist hiding out at the extraction point at the end of the road, but not without coming out into the open to do it. No, about the only thing this place is good for is a very obvious diversion. Now, the box-strewn warehouse underneath—that's a different story.

6 This suite of rooms overlooking the SEALs' start point would be a great place for terrorists to rush to if they suspect that the SEALs haven't moved the VIPs. It has two entrances, neither of which is visible from the SEALs' start point, and it can be reasonably well defended. Alternately, it can serve as a spot for SEALs to stash the last remaining VIP if the other two are killed off; it's one of the few places on the SEALs' side of the map that can be decently protected against snipers, grenade attacks, and ground incursions.

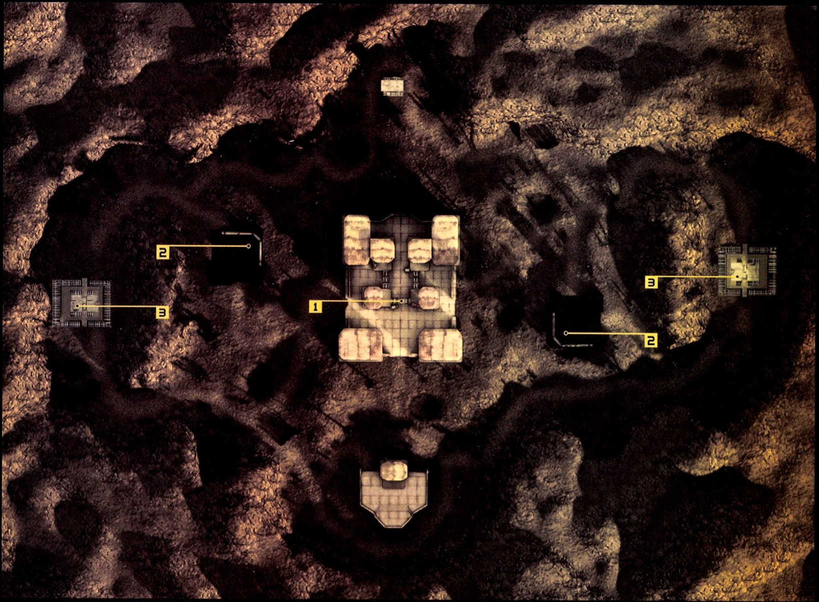
7 Just off these rooms is a stairway with a broken railing, which allows enterprising campers to position themselves below the stairs, offering a well-hidden view of anyone coming down from above. Not terribly useful, to be sure, but it could be the difference in a heated match.

8 Finally, in a surprising contrast to the last map, After Hours, Liberation sports very little in the way of out-of-the way sniper spots. In fact, the only "secret" snipe point we could find was this paltry tent in the back of the balconied marketplace. If you jump carefully onto the low stack of boxes in front of it and then to the higher stack, you can leap onto the tent, climb around to the back, and lay prone without being seen from below. Yay. «

GAME	PUBLISHER	SCORE	ISSUE
F1 Career Challenge	**EA Sports**	●●●●●	**71**
F1 Championship	Ubisoft	●●●●	43
F1 Championship Season 2000	EA Sports	●●◖	41
Fallout: Brotherhood of Steel	Interplay	●●◖	78
Fantavision	Sony CEA	●●●●	40
Fatal Frame	Tecmo	●●●●	55
Fatal Frame 2: Crimson Butterfly	Tecmo	●●●●	77
Ferrari F355 Challenge	Sega	●●	61
FIFA 2001 Major League Soccer	EA Sports	●●●●◖	39
FIFA 2002	EA Sports	●●●●◖	51
FIFA Soccer 2003	**EA Sports**	●●●●●	**63**
⚡FIFA Soccer 2004	**EA Sports**	●●●●●	**75**
⚡FIFA Soccer 2005	**EA Sports**	●●●●●	**86**
Fight Club	Vivendi Universal	●◖	87
⚡Fight Night 2004	**EA Sports**	●●●●	**80**
Fighter Maker 2	Agetec	●◖	64
Final Fantasy X	**Square EA**	●●●●●	**53**
Final Fantasy X-2	**Square Enix USA**	●●●●●	**75**
⚡Final Fantasy XI	**Square Enix USA**	●●●●●	**78**
⚡Final Fantasy XI: Chains of Promathia	Square Enix USA	●●●●	87
Finding Nemo	**THQ**	●●●◖	**71**
Fireblade	Midway	●●◖	59
Fisherman's Challenge	Konami	●●	67
Ford Racing 2	Gotham Games	●●◖	76
Forever Kingdom	Agetec	●◖	53
Forgotten Realms: Demon Stone	Atari	●●●◖	86
Formula One 2001	Sony CEA	●●◖	50
Freaky Flyers	Midway	●●●◖	72
Freedom Fighters	**EA Games**	●●●●●	**73**
Freekstyle	**EA Sports Big**	●●●●	**59**
Freestyle Metal X	Midway	●●●	71
Frequency	Sony CEA	●●●◖	52
Frogger: The Great Quest	Konami	●◖	53
Frogger's Adventure: The Rescue	Konami	●●◖	76
Front Mission 4	Square Enix	●●●●	82
Fugitive Hunter	Encore	●	76
Fur Fighters: Viggo's Revenge	Acclaim	●●●	46
Futurama	Vivendi Universal	●●◖	72
Future Tactics: The Uprising	Crave	●●●◖	81
G1 Jockey 3	Koei	●●●◖	69
Gadget Racers	Conspiracy	●●●◖	50
Galactic Wrestling Featuring Ultimate Muscle	Bandai	●●◖	82
Galerians: Ash	Sammy	●◖	66
Gallop Racer	Tecmo	●●	48
Gallop Racer 2003: A New Breed	Tecmo	●●●	69
Gallop Racer 2004	Tecmo	●●●●	85
Gauntlet: Dark Legacy	Midway	●●●◖	46
The Getaway	Sony CEA	●●●●	66
Get on da Mic	Eidos	●●	87
Ghosthunter	Namco	●●◖	84
Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex	Bandai	●●	87
Giants: Citizen Kabuto	Interplay	●●●◖	51
Gitaroo-Man	Koei	●●●◖	53
Gladiator: Sword of Vengeance	Acclaim	●●	75
Gladius	LucasArts	●●●●	74
Goblin Commander: Unleash the Horde	Jaleco	●●◖	76
GoDai: Elemental Force	3DO	●◖	54
Gradius III and IV	Konami	●●◖	39
Gradius V	Konami	●●●◖	85
Gran Turismo 3: A-spec	**Sony CEA**	●●●●●	**46**
Grand Prix Challenge	Atari	●●●◖	68
Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	**Rockstar**	●●●●●	**87**
Grand Theft Auto: Vice City	**Rockstar**	●●●●●	**63**
Grand Theft Auto III	**Rockstar**	●●●●●	**52**
Grandia II	Ubisoft	●●●◖	53
Grandia Xtreme	Enix	●●●◖	62
Gravity Games Bike: Street, Vert, Dirt	Midway	◖	61
The Great Escape	Gotham Games	●●●◖	72
GTC Africa	Majesco	●●◖	58
Guilty Gear Isuka	Sammy	●●●●	86
Guilty Gear X	Majesco/Sammy	●●●●	51
Guilty Gear X2	Sammy	●●●●	66
Gungrave	Sega	●●●◖	61
Gungrave: Overdose	Mastiff	●●●◖	86
Gungriffon Blaze	Working Designs	●●●◖	39
The Guy Game	Gathering	●	85
Half-Life	**Sierra**	●●●●●	**51**
Harry Potter: Quidditch World Cup	**EA Games**	●●●	**75**
Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone	EA Games	●◖	76
Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets	EA Games	●●●◖	64
Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban	EA Games	●●●●	82
Harvest Moon: Save the Homeland	Natsume	●●●●	51
Haunted Mansion	TDK	●●●	77
Haven: Call of the King	Midway	●●●◖	64
Headhunter	Acclaim	●●●	57
Headhunter: Redemption	Sega	●●●	86
Herdy Gerdy	Eidos	●●●	56
Heroes of Might and Magic	3DO	●●◖	46
Hidden Invasion	Conspiracy	●●●	60
High Heat MLB 2002	3DO	●●●●	44
High Heat MLB 2003	3DO	●●●●◖	55
High Heat MLB 2004	**3DO**	●●●●●	**67**
Hitman: Contracts	Eidos	●●●●◖	81
Hitman 2: Silent Assassin	**Eidos**	●●●●◖	**63**
The Hobbit	Vivendi Universal	●●●◖	76
Hot Shots Golf 3	**Sony CEA**	●●●●	**55**
⚡Hot Shots Golf Fore!	Sony CEA	●●●◖	85
Hot Wheels: Velocity X	THQ	●●◖	64
The Hulk	**Vivendi Universal**	●●●●	**70**
Hunter: The Reckoning–Wayward	Interplay	●●◖	72
Hypersonic Xtreme	Majesco	●●◖	67
I-Ninja	Namco	●●●◖	75
Ico	**Sony CEA**	●●●●●	**50**
Indiana Jones and the Emperor's Tomb	LucasArts	●●●	71
Indy Car Series	Codemasters	●●●	71
Intellivision Lives!	Crave	●●●◖	77
Island Extreme Stunts	EA Games	●●●◖	65
The Italian Job	Eidos	●●	72
Jade Cocoon 2	Ubisoft	●●●◖	53
Jak and Daxter: The Precursor Legacy	**Sony CEA**	●●●●●	**52**
Jak II	**Sony CEA**	●●●◖	**74**
Jak 3	Sony CEA	●●●●◖	87
James Bond 007: Agent Under Fire	**EA Games**	●●●●	**52**
James Bond 007: Everything or Nothing	EA Games	●●●●◖	79
James Bond 007: NightFire	**Activision**	●●●●◖	**64**
James Cameron's Dark Angel	Sierra	●●	65
Jeopardy!	Atari	●●◖	77
Jeremy McGrath Supercross World	Acclaim	●	53
Jet X20	Sony CEA	●●	63
Jonny Moseley Mad Trix	3DO	●◖	54
Judge Dredd: Dredd vs. Death	Evolved Games	●●◖	80
The Jungle Book: Rhythm n' Groove	Ubisoft	●●●	69
Jurassic Park: Operation Genesis	Universal Int.	●●●●◖	68
K-1 World Grand Prix	Konami	●●	71
Karaoke Revolution	Konami	●●●●	75
Karaoke Revolution Volume 2	Konami	●●●●◖	83
Karaoke Revolution Volume 3	Konami	●●●●◖	87
Katamari Damacy	Namco	●●●●◖	86
Kelly Slater's Pro Surfer	Activision	●●●◖	61
Kengo: Master of Bushido	Crave	●●●	42
Kessen	EA Games	●●●	39
Kessen II	Koei	●●●	51
kill.switch	**Namco**	●●●●◖	**75**
⚡Killzone	Sony CEA	●●●●	87
Kinetica	Sony CEA	●●●●◖	50
King of Fighters 2000/2001	Bandai	●●◖	76
King of Fighters: Maximum Impact	SNK Playmore	●●●	87
The King of Route 66	Sega	●●●	67
King's Field: The Ancient City	Agetec	●●	55
Kingdom Hearts	**Square EA**	●●●●◖	**61**
Klonoa 2: Lunatea's Veil	Namco	●●●●◖	47
Knockout Kings 2001	EA Sports	●●●●	42
Knockout Kings 2002	EA Sports	●●●●	55
Kuon	Agetec	●●◖	87
Kya: Dark Lineage	Atari	●●◖	76
La Pucelle: Tactics	Mastiff	●●●●	81
Le Mans 24 Hours	Infogrames	●●◖	48
Legacy of Kain: Defiance	Eidos	●●◖	76
Legaia 2: Duel Saga	Fresh Games	●●●	63
The Legend of Alon D'ar	Ubisoft	●◖	54
Legends of Wrestling	Acclaim	●●◖	53
Legends of Wrestling II	Acclaim	●●●	65
Legion: The Legend of Excalibur	Midway	●●●	59
Lego Racers 2	Lego Media	●●◖	51
Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude	Vivendi Universal	●●◖	87
Lethal Skies	Sammy	●●●	58
Lethal Skies II	Sammy	●●●◖	74
Looney Tunes: Back in Action	EA Games	●	76
The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring	Black Label	●●●◖	63
⚡The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King	**EA Games**	●●●●●	**75**
The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers	**EA Games**	●●●●◖	**63**
Lowrider	Jaleco	●◖	77
Lupin the 3rd: Treasure of the Sorcerer King	Bandai	●●●◖	78
Mace Griffin Bounty Hunter	Vivendi Universal	●●	71
Mad Maestro!	Eidos/Fresh	●●●	56
Madden NFL 2001	EA Sports	●●●●◖	38
Madden NFL 2002	EA Sports	●●●●◖	48
⚡Madden NFL 2003	**EA Sports**	●●●●●	**60**
⚡Madden NFL 2004	**EA Sports**	●●●●●	**72**
⚡Madden NFL 2005	EA Sports	●●●●◖	83
Mafia	Gathering	●●●◖	79
Magic Pengel: The Quest for Color	Agetec	●●●●	69
Malice	Mud Duck	●●◖	84
Manhunt	**Rockstar**	●●●◖	**76**
The Mark of Kri	Sony CEA	●●●	59
Marvel vs. Capcom 2	Capcom	●●●●	61
Mat Hoffman's Pro BMX 2	Activision	●●●●	60
Max Payne	**Rockstar**	●●●●	**53**
Max Payne 2: The Fall of Max Payne	Rockstar	●●●◖	77
Maximo: Ghosts to Glory	**Capcom**	●●●◖	**54**
Maximo vs. Army of Zin	Capcom	●●●●	77
McFarlane's Evil Prophecy	Konami	◖	84
MDK2 Armageddon	Interplay	●●●◖	45
Medal of Honor: Frontline	**EA Games**	●●●●●	**58**
⚡Medal of Honor: Rising Sun	**EA Games**	●●●◖	**76**
Mega Man Anniversary Collection	Capcom	●●●◖	83
Mega Man X: Command Mission	Capcom	●●●◖	86
Mega Man X7	Capcom	●●●◖	74
Men in Black II: Alien Escape	Infogrames	●●◖	60
Metal Arms: Glitch in the System	Vivendi Universal	●●●●	75
Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty	**Konami**	●●●●●	**51**
Metal Gear Solid 2: Substance	**Konami**	●●●●●	**67**
Metropolismania	Natsume	●●●	61
Midnight Club	**Rockstar**	●●●●	**39**
⚡Midnight Club II	**Rockstar**	●●●●●	**67**
Midway Arcade Treasures	Midway	●●●◖	76
Midway Arcade Treasures 2	Midway	●●●●	87
Mike Tyson Heavyweight Boxing	Codemasters	●	58
Minority Report	Activision	●●◖	65
Mission: Impossible–Operation Surma	Atari	●●	77
Mister Mosquito	Eidos/Fresh	●●●◖	56
MLB 2004	Sony CEA	●●●	67
⚡MLB 2005	Sony CEA	●●●◖	80
MLB SlugFest 20-03	Midway	●●●●	59
MLB SlugFest 20-04	Midway	●●●●	67
⚡MLB SlugFest: Loaded	Midway	●●●◖	83
Mobile Light Force 2	XS Games	●●●◖	69
Mobile Suit Gundam: Encounters in Space	Bandai	●	75
Mobile Suit Gundam: Federation vs. Zeon	Bandai	●●●◖	61
Mobile Suit Gundam: Journey to Jaburo	Bandai	●	48
Mobile Suit Gundam: Zeonic Front	Bandai	●●●	54
Mojo!	Crave	●●◖	73
Monopoly Party	Infogrames	●●●	65
Monster 4x4: Masters of Metal	Ubisoft	●●◖	77
Monster Hunter	Capcom	●●●●	86
Monster Rancher 3	Tecmo	●●●●	50
Monster Rancher 4	Tecmo	●●●◖	75
Monsters, Inc.	Sony CEA	●●●◖	55
Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance	**Midway**	●●●●	**64**
⚡Mortal Kombat: Deception	Midway	●●●●	87
MotoGP	Namco	●●●●	39
MotoGP2	Namco	●●●●◖	53
MotoGP3	Namco	●●●●◖	67
Motor Mayhem	Infogrames	●●●	47
MTV Music Generator 2	Codemasters	●●●	46
MTV Music Generator 3: This Is the Remix	Codemasters	●●●◖	82
MTV's Celebrity Deathmatch	Gotham Games	●◖	76
⚡MTX: Mototrax	Activision	●●◖	80
The Mummy Returns	Universal	●◖	52
Music Maker	Magix	●●●●	69
MVP Baseball 2003	EA Sports	●●●◖	67
⚡MVP Baseball 2004	EA Sports	●●●●◖	80
MX 2002 Featuring Ricky Carmichael	THQ	●●●●	47
MX Rider	Infogrames	●●●◖	52

FREEDOM FIGHTERS

Like the gang wars in *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*? You should dig through a bargain bin at your local game store and see if you can find a copy of Io Interactive's (the *Hitman* guys) *Freedom Fighters*. It's a bit like *SOCOM* with gangs, and it's awesome.



KILLZONE MULTIP

WEAPONS AND WEAPON PLACEMENT ON TWO OF OUR FAVORITE ONLINE MAPS

SOUTHERN HILLS

USING STRUCTURES AS SHELTER

The symmetry of this level works well for team-based games because it provides such an even playing field. As you can see from the level layout, the base is smack dab in the middle of the map, with the other structures serving as "skirmish points" or shelter for battle.

Don't be afraid to stick behind a wall and pick your opponent apart from a distance. Sure, sometimes it can feel like you're not dishing out the damage quite as quickly as some of your teammates. But during team-based games, remember that your deaths count almost as much as your kills. Stay covered and you'll find yourself dying far less often.

1 THE PNV-3 SISKA

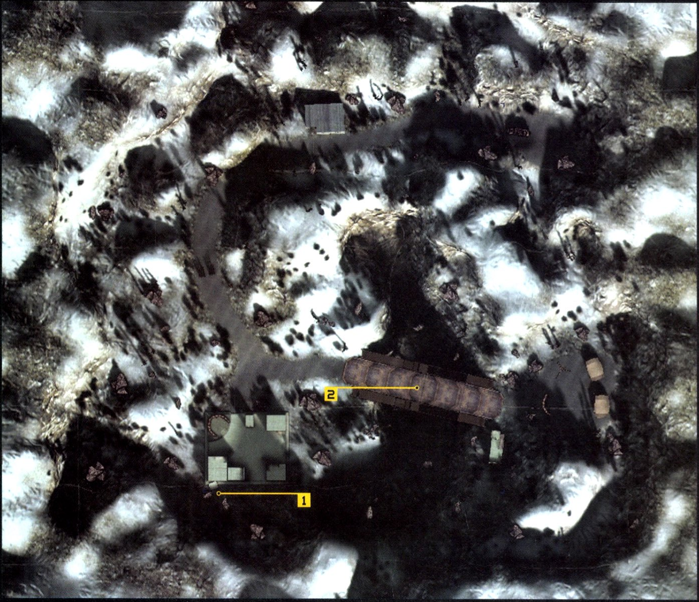
You'll find the Siska in the center of the base, up on the bridge. Like any of the other levels, this is a sought-after weapon because of its damage.

Near-instant hit speed keeps the Siska projectiles useful for even the longest of distances. At close range, though, make sure you aim at the feet of your opponent rather than directly at them. It increases your chances of connecting and almost guarantees you'll dizzy them with splash damage from the explosion. Using an assault rifle while dizzy is anything but easy.

USING GRENADES EFFECTIVELY

This level has the 2 BP-02, the 3 M327, and of course, the standard M134 hand grenades. With all the little nooks and crannies formed by the hills, it's the absolute perfect setting to use any of the above.

We found it useful to use grenades—or better yet, "door knockers"—when entering occupied rooms in the base area. If you've got a holed-up individual or even a holed-up team, then grenades are one of the best ways to flush them out. Take note of the extra grenade locations!



WHAT WE SAID IN THE REVIEW...

The good? "Slick tactical approach to FPS design, harsh and gritty visual aesthetic, solid multi-player, and the weapons (except the odd sniper rifle) are awesome." What didn't we like? "Engine pushes the PS2 too hard, occasional A.I. quirks, and some weak levels."

AYER

CANYON CROSSING

THE HILLS

This is a large map that's absolutely littered with rolling hills connecting the outside borders to the building-populated main area. Many of the player respawn points are scattered up in the hills, well beyond the buildings. That said, you'll need to learn item placement as quickly as you can.

If you stay crouched on top of almost any hill, you'll have a great view of the level without making yourself an open target. Grab a weapon with zoom and you'll have a good time picking off enemies from afar.

1 PNV-3 SISKA TIPS

The Siska has an incredibly slow reload time, but its damage and range make it a desirable and interesting weapon. If you're smart, you'll time the Siska respawn and do loops around the area to keep other players from getting it.

From long range, remember that the Siska rounds will drop a little more severely than a standard bullet. With that in mind, make sure you adjust your crosshairs a little higher than normal if you're aiming at someone across the level. The hills are a great place to use the Siska.

2 THE BRIDGE

The bridge is the one key landmark on this level, and as such, it really attracts a lot of attention during deathmatches. Take note of this if you're applying the "pick up the scraps" technique. If you show up with a high-powered explosive weapon, approach from the hills on the side and you'll take players by surprise. This is one of the quickest ways to rack up kills.

Underneath the bridge is a series of steel walkways. On these walkways are a plethora of items that tend to draw players toward them. We recommend staying off the walkways if you can. Any player who knows what they're doing won't let you get back up once you've gone below. «

FACE-OFF

NEED FOR SPEED UNDERGROUND 2 VS. BURNOUT 3: TAKEDOWN

THE QUESTIONS	NEED FOR SPEED UNDERGROUND 2	BURNOUT 3: TAKEDOWN
OPM Name one thing in your game that you're most proud of now that it's finished.	**CHUCK OSIEJA, EXECUTIVE PRODUCER** The No. 1 request we received following the release of *NFSU* was for an open-world environment with more variety, and I'm proud that we were able to deliver.	**MATT WEBSTER, EXECUTIVE PRODUCER** I think that the top one has to be the introduction of aggressive racing and takedowns into this genre. The feeling early on in the development of *B3* was that this could be revolutionary, and I feel that it's achieved that.
OPM Name one thing you wish you'd done differently.	**CO** I wish we were able to spend even more time with the career mode. We created such a massive city that most people will never find everything that's hidden in the game.	**MW** I kinda think that we could have done a lot more with the cars, making them mean more for the player. My sense is that people don't think too hard when selecting a car from their garage.
OPM What have you seen in the other guys' game that made you think, "Damn, I wish we'd done that"?	**CO** The damage and mayhem in *Burnout 3* is the most amazing and visceral I've seen in any game. The impact and the destruction of the cars in the game literally make you flinch. Because we use licensed cars, creating car damage to that extent is not something we got the opportunity to do in *NFSU2*.	**MW** I love the fact that I can sit with the car and make it my own, and that it drives me to play the game even more. It's such a well-designed and well-executed part of the game. Additionally, it would be the introduction of "driving" around the game, deciding what I'm going to do from behind the wheel. That's a great concept.
OPM What have you seen that made you think, "Tee hee, we did that better"?	**CO** Atmosphere! I think from the moment you step foot in Bayview, you feel like you're a part of the world and have a vested interest in what's going on around you.	**MW** It's got to be the sense of speed. It's a core of *Burnout* that we've got to have the player consciously telling their eyelids to blink! That, and our crash and particle systems.
OPM Does it bother you that you have to compete with another EA racing game on store shelves?	**CO** No, not really. While both games feature cars, they offer totally different experiences. I find myself picking up *Burnout 3* with friends or when I just want to get a racing fix and don't have a lot of time. *NFSU2* is more of an investment for me; I spend a lot of time exploring, racing, and building out my car to get it just right. *Burnout 3* is a trip though the drive-though, and *NFSU2* is like sitting down for Thanksgiving dinner. They both fill you up, but they are vastly different meals.	**MW** Well, I actually think that the two games are complementary. I truly believe that people will want to go for both, and that's a result of us working together and being smart about the fact that we have two driving games in the stable. It's much better to work together and help define where the games differentiate, and competition between the teams to be the best that they can be is really healthy! Ultimately, it will make both teams and titles much, much better.

DID YOU KNOW?

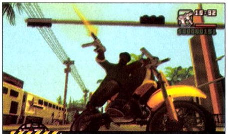
Need for Speed Underground quickly became one of the big success stories of last year. By October of this year, its worldwide sales had reached a whopping 7 million units, making it the most successful new racing franchise of recent years.

GAME	PUBLISHER	SCORE	ISSUE
MX Superfly Featuring Ricky Carmichael	THQ	●●●◖	59
⚡ My Street	Sony CEA	●●●	67
Myst III: Exile	Ubisoft	●●●◖	63
Mystic Heroes	Koei	●●◖	64
MX Unleashed	**THQ**	●●●	**79**
Namco Museum	**Namco**	●●●◖	**53**
NASCAR 2001	EA Sports	●●◖	40
⚡ NASCAR 2005: Chase for the Cup	**EA Sports**	●●●●●	**85**
NASCAR Heat	Infogrames	●●●●	47
NASCAR Thunder 2002	EA Sports	●●●●◖	51
NASCAR Thunder 2003	EA Sports	●●●●◖	62
⚡ NASCAR Thunder 2004	**EA Sports**	●●●●●	**73**
NASCAR: Dirt to Daytona	Infogrames	●●●◖	63
Naval Ops: Warship Gunner	Koei	●●●	71
NBA 2K2	**Sega Sports**	●●●●●	**53**
⚡ NBA 2K3	**Sega Sports**	●●●●●	**63**
NBA Ballers	Midway Sports	●●●●	80
NBA Hoopz	Midway	●●●	44
NBA Jam 2004	Acclaim	●●◖	75
NBA Live 2001	EA Sports	●●●	42
NBA Live 2002	EA Sports	●●◖	51
⚡ NBA Live 2003	EA Sports	●●●●	63
⚡ NBA Live 2004	EA Sports	●●●●◖	75
⚡ NBA Live 2005	EA Sports	●●●●	86
NBA ShootOut 2001	Sony CEA	●●◖	44
NBA ShootOut 2003	Sony CEA	●●●	63
⚡ NBA ShootOut 2004	Sony CEA	●●●	75
NBA Starting Five	Konami	●●◖	63
NBA Street	**EA Sports Big**	●●●●●	**47**
NBA Street Vol. 2	**EA Sports Big**	●●●●●	**68**
⚡ NCAA College Basketball 2K3	Sega Sports	●●●●	64
NCAA College Football 2K3	Sega Sports	●●◖	60
NCAA Final Four 2001	Sony CEA	●	41
NCAA Final Four 2002	Sony CEA	●◖	52
NCAA Final Four 2003	Sony CEA	●●◖	64
⚡ NCAA Final Four 2004	Sony CEA	●●	76
NCAA Football 2002	EA Sports	●●●●◖	48
NCAA Football 2003	**EA Sports**	●●●●●	**60**
⚡ NCAA Football 2004	**EA Sports**	●●●●●	**71**
⚡ NCAA Football 2005	EA Sports	●●●●◖	83
NCAA GameBreaker 2001	Sony CEA	●◖	41
NCAA GameBreaker 2003	Sony CEA	●●	61
⚡ NCAA GameBreaker 2004	Sony CEA	●●◖	73
NCAA March Madness 2002	EA Sports	●●●	53
NCAA March Madness 2003	EA Sports	●●●	64
⚡ NCAA March Madness 2004	EA Sports	●●●●	76
Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit 2	**EA Games**	●●●●●	**62**
⚡ Need for Speed Underground	**EA Games**	●●●●◖	**76**
⚡ Need for Speed Underground 2	**EA Games**	●●●●●	**87**
Neo Contra	Konami	●●●◖	87
NFL 2K2	**Sega Sports**	●●●◖	**52**
⚡ NFL 2K3	Sega Sports	●●●●◖	60
NFL Blitz 20-02	Midway	●●●●	55
NFL Blitz 20-03	Midway	●●●◖	60
⚡ NFL Blitz Pro	Midway Sports	●●●	74
NFL GameDay 2001	Sony CEA	●	40
NFL GameDay 2002	Sony CEA	●◖	53
⚡ NFL GameDay 2003	Sony CEA	●●◖	61
⚡ NFL GameDay 2004	Sony CEA	●●●	73
NFL Quarterback Club 2001	Acclaim	●●◖	50
⚡ NFL Street	**EA Sports Big**	●●●●◖	**78**
NHL 2001	EA Sports	●●●●	38
NHL 2002	EA Sports	●●●●◖	50
NHL 2003	EA Sports	●●●◖	63
⚡ NHL 2004	EA Sports	●●●●	73
⚡ NHL 2005	EA Sports	●●●◖	85
NHL 2K3	**Sega Sports**	●●●●●	**64**
NHL FaceOff 2001	Sony CEA	●●●◖	43
NHL FaceOff 2003	Sony CEA	●●	64
NHL Hitz 20-02	Midway	●●●●	51
NHL Hitz 20-03	Midway	●●●●◖	62
⚡ NHL Hitz Pro	Midway	●●●●	73
Nightmare of Druaga	Namco	●●	87
Ninja Assault	Namco	●●◖	61
No One Lives Forever	Sierra	●●●◖	56
Okage: Shadow King	Sony CEA	●●●	51
Oni	Rockstar	●◖	43
Onimusha: Warlords	**Capcom**	●●●●	**43**

NASCAR 2005, HUGE SURPRISE

We weren't expecting the latest NASCAR game from EA Sports to be quite so engaging, especially to those who aren't fans of the sport. Call it the "EA-ification" of the game. The next EA Sports franchise to get that kind of treatment? Look for a new *Fight Night* in 2005.

GAME	PUBLISHER	SCORE	ISSUE
Onimusha 2: Samurai's Destiny	**Capcom**	●●●●	**60**
Onimusha 3: Demon Siege	Capcom	●●●●◖	81
Orphen: Scion of Sorcery	Activision	●●●	39
Pac-Man Fever	Namco	●●	60
Pac-Man World 2	**Namco**	●●●●◖	**54**
PaRappa the Rapper 2	Sony CEA	●●●◖	53
Paris-Dakar Rally	Acclaim	●●	53
Phantom Brave	NIS America	●●●●◖	85
Pirates: The Legend of Black Kat	EA Games	●●●◖	55
Pitfall: The Lost Expedition	Activision	●●	80
Pool Paradise	Ignition	●●●◖	83
Portal Runner	3DO	●●	50
Power Drome	Mud Duck	●	84
The Powerpuff Girls: Relish Rampage	Bam	●●	65
Pride FC	THQ	●●●●	65
Primal	Sony CEA	●●●●	68
Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time	**Ubisoft**	●●●●●	**75**
Pro Race Driver	Codemasters	●●●●◖	65
Project Eden	Eidos	●●●◖	52
Pryzm Chapter One: The Dark Unicorn	TDK Mediactive	●●◖	60
Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy	Midway	●●●●◖	82
P.T.O. IV	Koei	●●●	66
Q-Ball Billiards Master	Take-Two	●●●◖	40
Quake III Revolution	EA Games	●●●●◖	44
R: Racing Evolution	Namco	●●●●	76
R-Type Final	Eidos/Fresh Games	●●●●	78
Rally Fusion: Race of Champions	Activision	●●●	64
Rapala Pro Fishing	Activision	●●◖	85
Ratchet & Clank	**Sony CEA**	●●●●●	**63**
Ratchet & Clank: Going Commando	**Sony CEA**	●●●●●	**75**
⚡ Ratchet & Clank: Up Your Arsenal	**Sony CEA**	●●●●●	**87**
Rayman 2: Revolution	**Ubisoft**	●●●●●	**41**
Rayman 3: Hoodlum Havoc	Ubisoft	●●●◖	67
Rayman Arena	Ubisoft	●●●◖	57
RC Revenge Pro	Acclaim	●●◖	41
Ready 2 Rumble Boxing Round 2	Midway	●●●●	40
Real Pool	Infogrames	●●●◖	40
Red Card Soccer 20-03	Midway	●●●	57
Red Dead Revolver	Rockstar	●●●●	82
Red Faction	**THQ**	●●●●●	**46**
Red Faction II	THQ	●●●●	63
Reel Fishing III	Natsume	●●●●	72
Reign of Fire	Bam	●●●◖	63
Resident Evil Code: Veronica X	**Capcom**	●●●●◖	**48**
Resident Evil: Dead Aim	Capcom	●●●◖	70
Resident Evil Outbreak	Capcom	●●●◖	81
Return to Castle Wolfenstein: OR	Activision	●●●◖	71
Rez	Sega	●●●●◖	53
Ribbit King	Bandai	●●●	82
Ridge Racer V	Namco	●●●●◖	38
Riding Spirits	Bam	●●●◖	61
Ring of Red	Konami	●●●●	43
Rise to Honor	**Sony CEA**	●●●	**78**
⚡ Risk: Global Domination	Atari	●●●●	73
RLH: Run Like Hell	Interplay	●●●	62
Road Kill	Midway	●●●●	74
Road Trip	Conspiracy	●●●●	61
Robin Hood: Defender of the Crown	Capcom	●●◖	74
Robotech: Invasion	Global Star	●●●	86
Rocky	Ubisoft	●●●●	64
Rocky Legends	Ubisoft	●●◖	87
Robot Alchemic Drive	Enix	●●●●	63
Robotech: Battlecry	TDK	●●●◖	62
Rogue Ops	Kemco	●●◖	75
Romance of the Three Kingdoms VII	Koei	●●◖	60
Romance of the Three Kingdoms VIII	Koei	●●●	73
RPG Maker 2	Agetec	●●●◖	74
RTX Red Rock	LucasArts	●●	71
Rugby	EA Sports	●●●◖	48
Rugby 2004	EA Sports	●●●	73
Rumble Racing	EA Games	●●●●◖	45
Rune: Viking Warlord	Take-Two	●●◖	48
Rygar: The Legendary Adventure	Tecmo	●●●●◖	64
Salt Lake 2002	Eidos	●●◖	55
Samurai Jack: The Shadow of Aku	Sega	●●●●	80
Samurai Warriors	Koei/EA	●●●●	81
Saturday Night Speedway	Atari	●●◖	81
Savage Skies	Bam	●●●	56



READER REVIEWS

HOW MUCH DO YOU LOVE GTA: SAN ANDREAS? WE HIT THE 1UP MESSAGE BOARDS TO FIND OUT.

WHAT YOU SAID:

"I have been playing *GTA* since it used the 2D aerial view setup. I have been more and more impressed with each release, and *San Andreas* is no exception. I'm completely addicted to it and hope I finish soon, only so I can get some sleep again."
[●●●●●]

Nate Torbett

"Rockstar North has really outdone itself this time. [With] over 100 hours worth of gameplay here (not including the time spent doing whatever you please), you'll play half of the game and wonder where your life truly resides. The best part of it is that if you have played a *GTA* game before, you'll know this game is no recycled version of the previous titles. Clear your schedule out for this one. Your new name is CJ, welcome to San Andreas, enjoy your stay...."
[●●●●●]

Michael Grosse

"While waiting for this game to come out, I wasn't sure if it would be able to live up to the hype...but wow, it lives up to my expectations and surpasses them. I haven't even done very many missions yet but have had fun just riding around on a bicycle, doing drive-bys, driving around, shooting people, and skydiving, which is my favorite pastime so far. This game is excellent—it surpasses both *GTA3* and *GTA: Vice City* in almost every way, and I will be playing it for months, even years, to come."
[●●●●●]

Corey Knopf

"I just bought this game, and I must say that I am astounded by the sheer size of it! I feel for the level designers who must have put hundreds if not thousands of hours into constructing these beautiful cities. It's a lot more interactive than the last *GTA*, too; you can now personalize your character, eat in restaurants, and go to the casino! The game's atmosphere and sense of interactivity remind me of the *Shenmue* series on Dreamcast. This game has so much to offer, you can't go wrong with it."
[●●●●●]

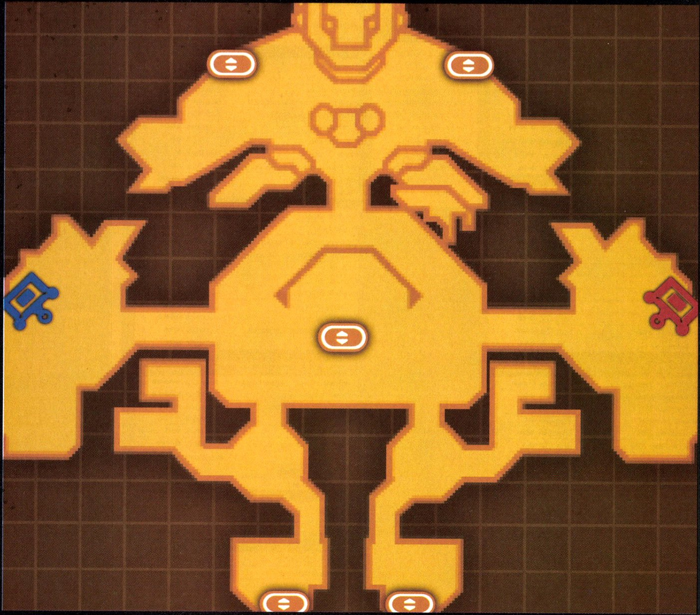
Gerrit Jan Kuipers

WHAT WE SAID:

"Spectacular—it sets the bar so high that it leaves a lot of games in the dust."
[●●●●●]

RATCHET & CLANK: UYA

MULTI- AND SINGLE-PLAYER TIPS FROM THE RATCHETEERS AT INSOMNIAC



MARCADIA (MULTIPLAYER)

- In capture the flag, a good strategy is to send the entire team on offense at once (sometimes it's a good idea to leave one person behind to defend). Try to have at least two people on offense use the gravity bomb to do some "crowd control." When two people have the gravity bomb and you are attacking to get the flag, they can be extremely effective because the area is so small. The lava gun is very good in this situation as well. While the people with the gravity bomb/lava gun control the opposing team, have a third member with charge boots make a dash for the flag.

- In a CTF match, place mines around your flag to deter the enemy from entering your base area. The best way to counter this strategy is to get the gravity bomb and drop a few into the pit with the flag before you jump in to steal it.

- A good deathmatch strategy is to get upgraded rockets as quickly as possible and then try to pick your opponents off from a distance with the RPG. The best way to counter a player with an upgraded RPG is to get the sheepinator and charge boots. Charge up to the opponent before they can get a lock on you and sheepinate them to steal the weapon.

- The player turret in the center of the map is a devastating weapon. However, when you use it, you are completely in the open and become everyone's prime target!

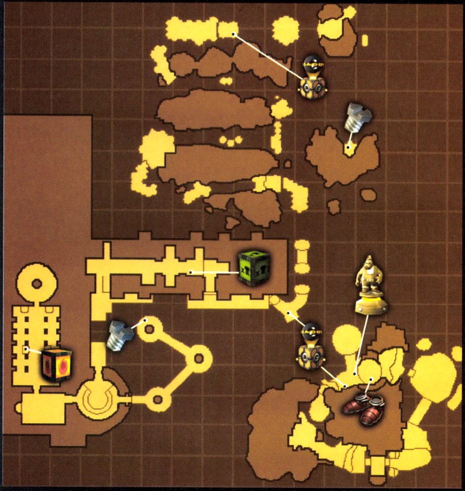
KORGON OUTPOST, PLANET TYHRRANOSIS [NOT PICTURED] (MULTIPLAYER)

- You can sacrifice a hovership to get on top of the enemy base and take out the defenses. But be careful, the turrets will respawn by the time you get back.

- There's a great sniper position just across the extendable bridge at each base. It can also be a key position in capture the flag games. If you charge-boot off this sniper point and wrench-slam at exactly the right moment, you can make it the entire way across the bridge, allowing you to quickly grab the flag.

- In siege mode, controlling the node in the center of the map is key, because the turboslider ramps will align so you can drive a vehicle from your base to your opponent's base (but your opponent won't be able to do the same). In capture the flag, controlling the center node allows you to get to the enemy base faster, but it makes it harder to get away (because the ramps are facing the wrong direction). So in CTF mode, it is usually better to not control the center node—let the enemy team have it.

- A good CTF strategy on this map is to get the charge boots and then have a buddy extend the bridges for you so you can make a fast getaway without having to use the hypershot. Your partner can also cover you as you return the flag.



PLANET DAXX (SINGLE PLAYER)

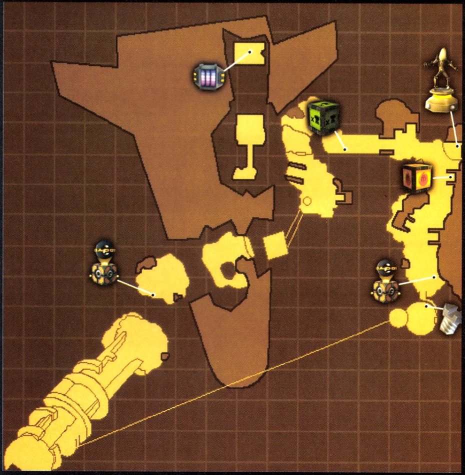
- Much of the architecture on Planet Daxx is destructible. What does this mean to you? It means the barricade you took cover behind after that ambush is now being torn apart by enemy fire. If you don't keep moving, you'll soon find yourself completely exposed.

- Daxx has some very interesting cover-crate placement. Be sure to use it to your advantage whenever possible.

- The miniturrets are very useful on this level because of the cover placements. Just toss a couple behind the cover and let them do the work for you.

- The holoshield is available for purchase in this level. And there's also a way to fully upgrade it to version 5! Are we gonna tell you how? No! We shouldn't have even told you that the possibility exists.

- Make sure you have enough firepower before you take on the battleship, otherwise you will run out of ammunition and be a sitting duck. (And not a friendly, flaming duck like those produced by the qwack-o-ray's damage!)



JORAAL CRASH SITE, PLANET ZELDRIN (SINGLE PLAYER)

- There is only one continue point at the crash site right in the middle of the level, so be sure to stock up on ammo before heading out.

- Rumor has it that Dr. Nefarious kept a device called a nanopack on the *Leviathan* (the crashed ship). Obtaining this trinket isn't required, but you won't be sorry if you can discover its location.

- For some reason, your enemies are desperate to keep you away from the wrecked space cruiser on this planet. You can expect that they'll be setting up traps, teleporting in, and ambushing you at every turn. What to do? Even the odds by bringing troops of your own! The Agents of Doom and a few well-placed miniturrets will make short work of an enemy legion while you hang back to take potshots with the weapon of your choice.

- This would be a great time to invest in the disk blade gun. It has a huge range, seeks out targets, and can hit multiple enemies. It's especially useful on those pesky flying soldier bots.

INSIDE INFO

In the wake of the release of *Up Your Arsenal*, Insomniac has relaunched its website. Visitors will find exclusive artwork and movies, forums frequented by Insomniac employees, exclusive codes for multi-player skins, and a regularly updated "blarg." Hit www.insomniacgames.com.

THE SPORTS GUY

STORIED FRANCHISES

TODD ZUNIGA
is a former *OPM* staffer turned freelance writer. If you have a question about sports games, want a prediction, or just disagree, mail him at thesportsguy@ziffdavis.com.

The psychology of buying sports games is this: infinite gameplay without ever getting a repeat result. Sports equals the best bargain in videogames by a long shot. Talk to any RPGer (at your own risk) and they'll gloat about sappy, tear-jerking story lines translated into hideously misspelled Japanglish sentences. But us sporty types know that sports are all about story lines without the silly sentimentality—from your *Madden* franchise where you turned the defensive end you drafted into the Defensive Rookie of the Year, to your late-minute strike to beat Arsenal in *Winning Eleven*'s Champions' League, to emerging victorious in your 11th straight three-point shootout over your Chatty Cathy trash-talking roommate in the latest *Live*.

With that in mind, I must report that I haven't played a sports game in three weeks (the exception being a review of Sony's *Gretzky NHL 2005*—though is hockey still a sport?). I'll admit moments of weakness when I've idly considered slam-dunk-contesting my way through the latest *NBA Live* or partaking in the realistically paced *NBA 2K5* or even building up DePaul's semireputable program in *March Madness 2005*. But then the load screen disappears and I emerge from my Los Santos crib, getting respect because I'm living the thug life as CJ, the illest mofo this side of Crenshaw Boulevard.

During my mild urges to get dunkadelic, I can't justify switching out discs when the game I'm playing figured out that it's possible to blend story line with infinite gameplay while leaving the gamer feeling like the coolest cat to ever hoist a DualShock. *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* is madness, folks (I recognize that this isn't a news flash), and when I even half glance at my hoops-heavy game shelf, I just jack a car, crank up NWA, and hit the Los Santos asphalt for a game of 1-on-1.

Beyond the *GTA* worship, it's time for pastime chatter. The Red Sox winning the World Series, I get—they dominated/crushed/humiliated the Redbirds. But didn't they get swept by the Yankees? It still feels daydreamlike. Next spring, when pinstripe-minded Yankees fans try to gloat about their proverbial 26 World Series rings, Red Sox Nation can hold up their latest ring (proverbially, of course) and say, "So? We got this." And how wonderful it will be when the default AL team for a game of *MVP 2005* quick play will be the World Champion BoSox. And while we're on the topic of hardball, and because it's December: Santa, all I want for Christmas is for Carlos Beltran to pretty please sign with the Cubs. And Pedro, too.

On to December's can't-miss contests: Football season this month means Saturday games—yes! *Madden*-picked must-sees: December 12, the Seahawks versus Vikings (this NFC Championship precursor has the Vikes victorious 20-17), and December 19's Broncos at Chiefs (my Broncs come up in a low scorer, 16-13—take that, Priest!). In European football, the Premiership could be decided with Arsenal versus Chelsea on December 12. And Christmas Day has rowmasters Shaq and Kobe toe-to-toeing in Los Santos—I mean Los Angeles. Drop the gloves! «

SPORTS EQUALS THE BEST BARGAIN IN VIDEOGAMES BY A LONG SHOT.

GAME	PUBLISHER	SCORE	ISSUE
Scooby-Doo! Mystery Mayhem	THQ	●●●	81
Scooby-Doo! Night of 100 Frights	**THQ**	**●●●**	**58**
The Scorpion King: Rise of the Akkadian	Universal	●●	62
Second Sight	Codemasters	●●●●	86
Secret Weapons Over Normandy	LucasArts	●●●●	75
Seek and Destroy	Conspiracy	●●●◖	66
Sega Bass Fishing Duel	Sega	●●●	62
Sega Soccer Slam	Sega Sports	●●	62
Sega Sports Tennis	Sega Sports	●●●●◖	60
⚡Serious Sam: Next Encounter	Global Star	●●●◖	81
Seven Samurai 20XX	Sammy	●●	80
Shadow Hearts	Midway	●●●●	52
Shadow Hearts: Covenant	Midway	●●●●	86
Shadow of Destiny	Konami	●●●◖	43
Shadow Man: 2econd Coming	Acclaim	●●	57
Shaun Palmer's Pro Snowboarder	Activision	●●◖	52
ShellShock: Nam '67	**Eidos**	**●●**	**85**

In addition to god mode and infinite ammo, the following codes allow you to go through the game as if you were looking at it through the eyes of Jimi Hendrix. It's a strange world out there. Enter the following codes at the Title screen:

God mode R3, L3, ←, →, L1, R1, R3, L3, ←, →, L1, R1

Infinite ammo R2, R1, △, L2, L1, ↑, R2, R1, △, L2, L1, ↑

Acid-trip mode ↑, R2, ○, →, △, □, L2, L1, ○, R1

GAME	PUBLISHER	SCORE	ISSUE
Shifters	3DO	●	58
Shin Megami Tensei: Nocturne	Atlus	●●●●◖	86
Shinobi	Sega	●●●◖	63
Showdown: Legends of Wrestling	Acclaim	●◖	83
Shox	EA Sports Big	●●●◖	63
Shrek 2	Activision	●●●◖	82
Shrek Super Party	TDK Mediactive	●●◖	64
Siren	Sony CEA	●●●	81
Silent Hill 2	**Konami**	**●●●●◖**	**50**
Silent Hill 3	Konami	●●●●◖	71

DON'T FORGET ABOUT SLY

With so many great games hitting at this time of year, don't overlook some of the awesome stuff you may have, well, overlooked. *Sly 2: Band of Thieves* is a perfect example. It's a beautiful game, it's packed with great ideas, and it's one of the best platformers on PS2.

GAME	PUBLISHER	SCORE	ISSUE
Silent Hill 4: The Room	Konami	●●●●◖	85
Silent Line: Armored Core	Agetec	●●●◖	70
Silent Scope	Konami	●●●	39
Silent Scope 2	Konami	●●●◖	49
Silent Scope 3	Konami	●●●◖	62
Silpheed: The Lost Planet	Working Designs	●●●◖	40
The Simpsons: Hit & Run	Vivendi Universal	●●●●	72
The Simpsons: Road Rage	**EA Games**	**●●●**	**52**
The Simpsons Skateboarding	EA Games	●◖	64
The Sims	EA Games	●●●●	65
⚡The Sims: Bustin' Out	EA Games	●●●●◖	76
Sky Gunner	Atlus	●●●◖	58
Sky Odyssey	Activision	●●●	40
Sled Storm	EA Sports Big	●●●◖	55
Sly Cooper and the Thievius Raccoonus	**Sony CEA**	**●●●●●**	**62**
Sly 2: Band of Thieves	**Sony CEA**	**●●●●●**	**86**

Here is a little gadget that will give Sly the ability to sprint from the get-go.

TIME RUSH GADGET

While playing, press Start, then press ↑, ↑, ↓, ↑, ←, →. Resume your game and press Select, and you will see the time rush gadget in your inventory.

GAME	PUBLISHER	SCORE	ISSUE
Smash Cars	Metro3D	●●●◖	71
Smash Court Tennis: Pro Tournament	Namco	●●●◖	56
Smash Court Tennis: Pro Tournament 2	Namco	●●●●	82
Smuggler's Run	**Rockstar**	**●●●●◖**	**39**
Smuggler's Run 2: Hostile Territory	Rockstar	●●●●◖	52
Soccer America: International Cup	Hot-B	●●	48
Soccer Mania	EA/Lego	●●●◖	59
⚡SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALs	**Sony CEA**	**●●●●●**	**60**
⚡SOCOM II: U.S. Navy SEALs	**Sony CEA**	**●●●●●**	**75**
Soldier of Fortune	Majesco	●●●	52
Sonic Heroes	Sega	●●	77
Soul Calibur II	**Namco**	**●●●●●**	**72**

GAME	PUBLISHER	SCORE	ISSUE
Soul Reaver 2	Eidos	●●●	52
Space Channel 5 Special Edition	Sega	●●●◖	75
Space Race	Infogrames	●●◖	59
Spawn Armageddon	Namco	●◖	76
Speed Kings	Acclaim	●●●●	70
Sphinx and the Cursed Mummy	THQ	●●●◖	75
Spider-Man	**Activision**	**●●●●◖**	**57**
Spider-Man 2	Activision	●●●◖	84
Splashdown	Infogrames	●●●●	52
Splashdown: Rides Gone Wild	**THQ**	**●●●●●**	**72**
SpongeBob SquarePants: Battle for Bikini Bottom	THQ	●●●●◖	75
SpongeBob SquarePants: The Movie	THQ	●●●●◖	87
Spy Fiction	Sammy	●●	85
SpyHunter	**Midway**	**●●●●◖**	**50**
SpyHunter 2	Midway	●●●	76
Spyro: Enter the Dragonfly	**Vivendi Universal**	**●●●**	**64**
Spyro: A Hero's Tail	Vivendi Universal	●●	87
⚡SRS: Street Racing Syndicate	Namco	●●●	64
SSX	**EA Sports Big**	**●●●●●**	**38**
SSX Tricky	**EA Sports Big**	**●●●●●**	**52**
⚡SSX 3	**EA Sports Big**	**●●●●●**	**74**
Star Ocean: Till the End of Time	Square Enix	●●●●	84
Star Trek: Shattered Universe	TDK	●●	75
Star Trek Voyager: Elite Force	Majesco	●●◖	53
Star Wars Battlefront	**LucasArts**	**●●●●◖**	**86**

You won't need lightspeed to skip ahead in *Star Wars Battlefront*. In fact, all you need is the following code to unlock all the planets.

UNLOCK ALL PLANETS

Choose the historical campaign. Enter □, ○, □, ○ at the Planet Selection screen.

GAME	PUBLISHER	SCORE	ISSUE
Star Wars Bounty Hunter	**LucasArts**	**●●●**	**64**
Star Wars: The Clone Wars	LucasArts	●●●	65
Star Wars Super Bombad Racing	LucasArts	●●	45
Star Wars Jedi Starfighter	LucasArts	●●●◖	56

GAME	PUBLISHER	SCORE	ISSUE
Star Wars Racer Revenge	LucasArts	●●●●◐	55
Star Wars Starfighter	**LucasArts**	●●●●◐	**43**
Starsky & Hutch	Gotham Games	●●	74
State of Emergency	**Rockstar**	●●●	**55**
Stitch: Experiment 626	Sony CEA	●●◐	59
Street Fighter Anniversary Collection	Capcom	●●●●	84
Street Fighter EX 3	Capcom	●●●◐	39
Street Hoops	**Activision**	●●●◐	**60**
Stretch Panic	Conspiracy	●●●◐	47
Strike Force Bowling	Crave	●◐	82
Stuntman	**Infogrames/Atari**	●●●	**59**
Sub Rebellion	Metro 3D	●●●●	62
The Suffering	Midway	●●●	80
Suikoden III	Konami	●●●	63
Summer Heat Beach Volleyball	Acclaim	●●●◐	72
Summoner	THQ	●●●	39
Summoner 2	THQ	●●●◐	62
Sunny Garcia Surfing	Ubisoft	●●●◐	51
Super Bust-A-Move	Acclaim	●●●	41
Super Bust-A-Move 2	Ubisoft	●●●◐	63
Super Trucks Racing	XS Games	●◐	76
Supercar Street Challenge	Activision	●●◐	52
Superman: Shadow of Apokolips	Atari	●●●◐	63
Surfing H30	Rockstar	●●	40
SWAT: Global Strike Team	Sierra	●●●	74
Swing Away Golf	EA Games	●●●	38
⚡Syphon Filter: The Omega Strain	Sony CEA	●●●	81
Taiko: Drum Master	Namco	●●●●	87
Tak and the Power of Juju	**THQ**	●●●◐	**75**
Tarzan: Untamed	Ubisoft	●●●◐	52
Taz: Wanted	Infogrames	●●●◐	60
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles	Konami	●●◐	75
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles 2	Konami	●	86
Tekken 4	**Namco**	●●●◐	**61**
Tekken Tag Tournament	**Namco**	●●●●◐	**39**
Tenchu: Wrath of Heaven	Activision	●●●	67
The Terminator: Dawn of Fate	Atari	●●◐	63
Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines	Atari	●◐	77
Terminator 3: The Redemption	Atari	●●●◐	86
Test Drive	**Infogrames**	●●●◐	**58**
Test Drive Off-Road: Wide Open	Infogrames	●●●	48
Test Drive: Eve of Destruction	Atari	●●●●	85
Tetris Worlds	THQ	●●	57
Theme Park Roller Coaster	EA Games	●●●●	41
The Thing	Universal	●●●	62
Thunderstrike: Operation Phoenix	Eidos	●◐	52
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2001	EA Sports	●●●	44
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2002	EA Sports	●●●●	55
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2003	EA Sports	●●●●◐	63
⚡Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004	**EA Sports**	●●●●●	**73**
⚡Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2005	EA Sports	●●●●◐	86
Time Crisis 2	Namco	●●●●	49
Time Crisis 3	Namco	●●●●◐	74
Time Crisis: Crisis Zone	Namco	●●●◐	86
TimeSplitters	**Eidos**	●●●●●	**39**
TimeSplitters 2	**Eidos**	●●●●●	**63**
TOCA Race Driver 2	Codemasters	●●●●	86
Tokyo Xtreme Racer 3	Crave	●●	76
Tokyo Xtreme Racer Zero	Crave	●●◐	45
Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon	Ubisoft	●●●◐	65
⚡Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon: Jungle Storm	**Ubisoft**	●●●◐	**78**
⚡Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six 3	Ubisoft	●●●●	80
Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell	Ubisoft	●●●●◐	68
⚡Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell Pandora Tomorrow	**Ubisoft**	●●●●●	**82**
Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness	**Eidos**	●●	**72**
⚡Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3	**Activision**	●●●●●	**51**
⚡Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4	**Activision**	●●●●●	**63**
⚡Tony Hawk's Underground	**Activision**	●●●●●	**76**
⚡Tony Hawk's Underground 2	Activision	●●●●◐	87
Top Angler	Xicat	●●●◐	57
Top Gear Dare Devil	Kemco	●●●◐	41
Top Gun: Combat Zones	Titus	●●●	50
Total Immersion Racing	Empire	●	66
Transformers	Atari	●●●◐	81
Transworld Surf	Infogrames	●●●◐	57
⚡Tribes: Aerial Assault	Sierra	●●●◐	62
Triple Play 2002	EA Sports	●●	55
Triple Play Baseball	EA Sports	●●	45
⚡Trivial Pursuit: Unhinged	Atari	●●	81
True Crime: Streets of L.A.	**Activision**	●●	**76**
Tsugunai: Atonement	Atlus	●●●	53
Turok: Evolution	Acclaim	●◐	62
Twisted Metal: Black	**Sony CEA**	●●●●●	**47**
⚡Twisted Metal: Black Online	Sony CEA	●●●●	61
Ty the Tasmanian Tiger	EA Games	●●●	62
UEFA Euro 2004	EA Sports	●●●●◐	82
UFC Throwdown	Crave	●●●◐	58
UFC Sudden Impact	Crave	●●●◐	82
Under the Skin	Capcom	●●●◐	86
Unison	Tecmo	●●●◐	44
Unlimited Saga	Square Enix	●●	70
Unreal Tournament	Infogrames	●●◐	40
V-Rally 3	Infogrames	●●●●◐	64
Vampire Night	Namco	●●◐	52
Van Helsing	Vivendi Universal	●●●◐	82
Vexx	Acclaim	●●	67
Victorious Boxers	Empire	●●●◐	51
Viewtiful Joe	Capcom	●●●●◐	85
Virtua Fighter 4	**Sega**	●●●●●	**55**
Virtua Fighter 4: Evolution	**Sega**	●●●●●	**72**
Virtual on Marz	Sega	●●	76
Wakeboarding Unleashed	Activision	●●●●◐	70
Wallace & Gromit in Project Zoo	Bam	●●●	74
War Jetz	3DO	●●◐	48
War of the Monsters	**Sony CEA**	●●●●●	**64**
⚡Warhammer 40,000: Fire Warrior	THQ	●●◐	74
Warriors of Might & Magic	3DO	●●◐	44
Wave Rally	Eidos	●◐	53
Way of the Samurai	Bam	●●●◐	59
Way of the Samurai 2	Capcom	●●●	82
Wheel of Fortune	Atari	●●◐	76
Whiplash	Eidos	●●●◐	76
Whirl Tour	Vivendi Universal	●●	63
Whiteout	Konami	●	65
Wild Arms 3	Sony CEA	●●●◐	62
Wild Wild Racing	Interplay	●●●	39
Winback	Koei	●●●●	43
Wipeout Fusion	Bam	●●●●◐	57
Wizardry: Tale of the Forsaken Land	Atlus	●●●	53
Woody Woodpecker: Buzz Buzzard Park	DreamCatcher	●●●	57
⚡World Championship Pool 2004	Jaleco	●●●◐	76
World Destruction League: Thunder Tanks	3DO	●●●	42
World of Outlaws: Sprint Cars	Infogrames	●●●●	55
World Series Baseball 2K3	Sega Sports	●●●●	67
World Soccer: Winning Eleven 6 Int'l	**Konami**	●●●●●	**67**
World Soccer: Winning Eleven 7 Int'l	**Konami**	●●●●●	**78**
World Tour Soccer 2002	Sony CEA	●●●●	53
World Tour Soccer 2003	Sony CEA	●●●●	65
⚡World Tour Soccer 2004	Sony CEA	●●●	80
Wrath Unleashed	LucasArts	●◐	78
WRC: World Rally Championship	**Bam**	●●●●●	**57**
Wreckless: The Yakuza Missions	Activision	●●	63
WTA Tour Tennis	Konami	●	57
WWE Crush Hour	THQ	●●◐	68
WWE SmackDown! Here Comes the Pain	**THQ**	●●●◐	**76**
WWE SmackDown! Shut Your Mouth	**THQ**	●●◐	**64**
WWE SmackDown! Just Bring It	**THQ**	●●●◐	**52**
X Squad	EA Games	●●●◐	38
The X-Files: Resist or Serve	Vivendi Universal	●●◐	81
X-Men Legends	**Activision**	●●●●	**87**

You can't fight crime looking like that! The following will put an extra outfit in the closet of each of the *X-Men Legends* characters.

XTRA COSTUMES

At the Main menu, press ↑, ↑, ←, →, ↓, ↓, Start.

GAME	PUBLISHER	SCORE	ISSUE
X-Men: Next Dimension	Activision	●●●	64
X2: Wolverine's Revenge	Activision	●●●	69
Xenosaga: Episode 1—Der Wille Zur Macht	Namco	●●●●	66
XGRA: Extreme-G Racing Association	Acclaim	●●●●◐	74
⚡XIII	Ubisoft	●●●◐	75
Yanya Caballista: City Skater	Koei	●●●◐	49
Yu-Gi-Oh! The Duelists of the Roses	Konami	●●◐	67
Zapper	Infogrames	●●◐	64
ZOE: Zone of the Enders	Konami	●●●●◐	44
Zone of the Enders: The 2nd Runner	Konami	●●●●◐	68

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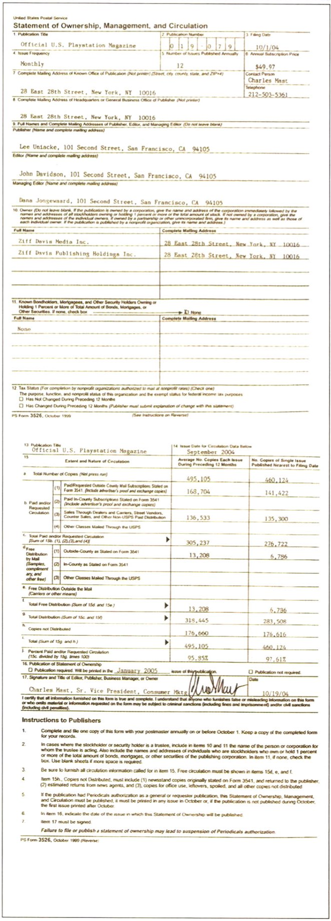

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f		Total Free Distribution (Sum of 15d. and 15e.) ▶	13,208	6,736
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h		Copies not Distributed	176,660	176,616
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16. Publication of Statement of Ownership
☐ Publication required. Will be printed in the January 2005 issue of this publication. ☐ Publication not required.

17. Signature and Title of Editor, Publisher, Business Manager, or Owner: Charles Mast, Sr. Vice President, Consumer Mktg. Date: 10/19/04

I certify that all information furnished on this form is true and complete. I understand that anyone who furnishes false or misleading information on this form or who omits material or information requested on the form may be subject to criminal sanctions (including fines and imprisonment) and/or civil sanctions (including civil penalties).

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3. Be sure to furnish all circulation information called for in item 15. Free circulation must be shown in items 15d, e, and f.
4. Item 15h., Copies not Distributed, must include (1) newsstand copies originally stated on Form 3541, and returned to the publisher, (2) estimated returns from news agents, and (3), copies for office use, leftovers, spoiled, and all other copies not distributed.
5. If the publication had Periodicals authorization as a general or requester publication, this Statement of Ownership, Management, and Circulation must be published; it must be printed in any issue in October or, if the publication is not published during October, the first issue printed after October.
6. In item 16, indicate the date of the issue in which this Statement of Ownership will be published.
7. Item 17 must be signed.

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PS Form 3526, October 1999 (Reverse)

HOW DO YOU TOP THAT?

2004 HAS PROBABLY BEEN THE BEST YEAR EVER FOR PS2, BUT WHAT OF 2005?

ESPN
NASCAR 2005
TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 2005
FIFA SOCCER 2005
SHELLSHOCK
SPYFICTION
Phantom Brave
TOCA Race Driver 2
HEADHUNTER
BLOODWILL
MONSTER HUNTER
CATWOMAN
SHREK 2
MORTAL KOMBAT DECEPTION
NBA LIVE 2005
La Pucelle TACTICS
NHL 2005

What's next? *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* is out, *Ratchet, Jak, MGS3, Killzone, Prince of Persia*, and a zillion others are already in stores, and there aren't enough hours in the day to play everything. Next month, we'll finish up the year with reviews of *Gran Turismo 4* and *GoldenEye*, but what happens then? Is 2005 going to be a complete disappointment? Given that all the big names just hit—is there anything to get giddy about? Skip to page 31 to find out what 2005 will bring, and then check out our five picks for the start of the year on page 36. Who knows? If things go according to plan, we may see a steady flow of great games all year in 2005. « *John Davison*

THE OPM FAMILY

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DANA JONGEWAARD

is a badass. No, really, she is—look, you can tell by all of the dope *GTA* gear that she's sporting. In fact, she's so badass that Rockstar has contacted her to be a consultant for the next episode in the series, *Grand Theft Auto: Des Moines*.

JOE RYBICKI

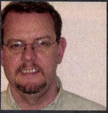
decided, after playing days' worth of *Prince of Persia: Warrior Within*, that he could run on walls just like his new hero. If you see him on the street in his shiny new wheelchair, make sure to ask to sign his cast. He's also accepting sympathy mail at johnnyhighground.com.

THIERRY NGUYEN

has a very messy desk that he cleans every 2.25 years. He doesn't grasp the concepts of "organization" and "filing." He also likes to surf the Internet for animated pictures of Gandalf laughing over and over again. We don't know how he gets anything done here.

GIANCARLO VARANINI

is tired, so very tired. Not only did he have to move to a new apartment, but his diet this month consisted mostly of small pieces of candy and alco...err, soda. Let this be a lesson to you, kids! Eat five square meals a day and plenty of vegetables.



LOGAN PARR

left a certain galaxy far, far away (LucasArts) with all its Ewok-shootin' goodness to be the new kid on the block and learn all the deep, dark secrets of *OPM*. He would tell you about them, but then he would mysteriously "disappear" and the disc would never get done!

RYAN VULK

has become one of the deadliest ninjas on the *OPM* staff and all of the Bay Area with the deadliest ninjutsu of them all, the pterodactyl. He tricks his target into looking high in the sky for an elusive beast, then strikes his mark with a flick of the wrist in the junk.

ALEJANDRO CHAVETTA

is impervious to Ryan's junk-punching tactics by virtue of his unbreakable skin. Said skin is also the key component in his joyous helmetless rides aboard his Buell and his ability to shrug off all incoming bullets and bad design aimed at him.

TODD ZUNIGA

spurned Canada for good and (finally) moved back to the United States (this time to NYC). Just in time for George Bush's reelection, which made him want to leave the country all over again. Aside from that, he's been playing and playing and playing *GTA: San Andreas*.

ZOE FLOWER

is a freelance writer, television producer, and member of the Canadian Tambourine Association. Her parents aren't hippies, and yes, that is her real name, although she answers to over 50 nicknames. In her spare time, she likes to kick strangers and memorize '80s power ballads.

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REWIND

FIVE YEARS AGO IN OPM

THIS MONTH IN HISTORY

Meanwhile, in the world beyond games: The world was reeling in the wake of absolutely no effects of the Y2K bug; six-year-old Elian Gonzales was being subpoenaed by the House of Representatives; America Online was buying Time Warner; a freak snowstorm was blanketing the astonished South; and *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire* was breaking television records. Where were you?

THE MORE THINGS CHANGE...

January of 2000 was the dawn of a new millennium (or a year away from the dawn of a new millennium, depending on how picky you are). What's surprising is how little has changed since then.

GRAN DESIGNS

Turns out that exactly five years ago we featured the same franchise on our cover as we do this month. *Gran Turismo 2* was wowing us with its increased realism, improved handling, and most shockingly its stable of over 500 cars. Our concise feature was the first to run the whole list (though, as it turned out, several got chopped from the final game).

PS2 PUSHES FORWARD

In our continuing coverage of the upcoming system, we featured more games that never made it out here, including *Virtual Ocean*, *Golf Paradise*, *Sky Surfer*, and *Munch's Oddysee*.

...AND I FEEL FINE

In a snarky nod to the widespread fears of global disaster arising around the Y2K bug, we at *OPM* did our part with "The End of the World Survival Guide." This 10-page manifesto featured the best of the best in the world of PlayStation—a handy guide to what to bring with you into your fallout shelter.

REVIEWS HIGHLIGHTS

Well, the highest-scoring game in January 2000 was *NBA Live 2000*, with 4.5 discs. But more interesting to readers of today would be the four-disc score given to *Twisted Metal 4*, which managed to partially redeem the horrible disappointment of *Twisted Metal III*.

REVIEWS LOWLIGHTS

Shadow Tower, at half a disc, was later to go down in history when we named it one of the worst games ever made. At the time we could only gawk at its pixellated ugliness.

DEMO MADNESS

While a few sports games made things interesting for the jock types, *Dino Crisis* was the real focus this month. Though the series never quite caught on the way *Resident Evil* did, it was still a darn fine survival-horror game.

CHART TOPPERS

Driver shot to the top of the sales charts in January of 2000, followed unsurprisingly by *Final Fantasy VIII* and the third-place debut of *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater*. Rounding out the top five were *Madden NFL 2000* and *NASCAR 2000*. Four out of five still-relevant series ain't bad, right? «

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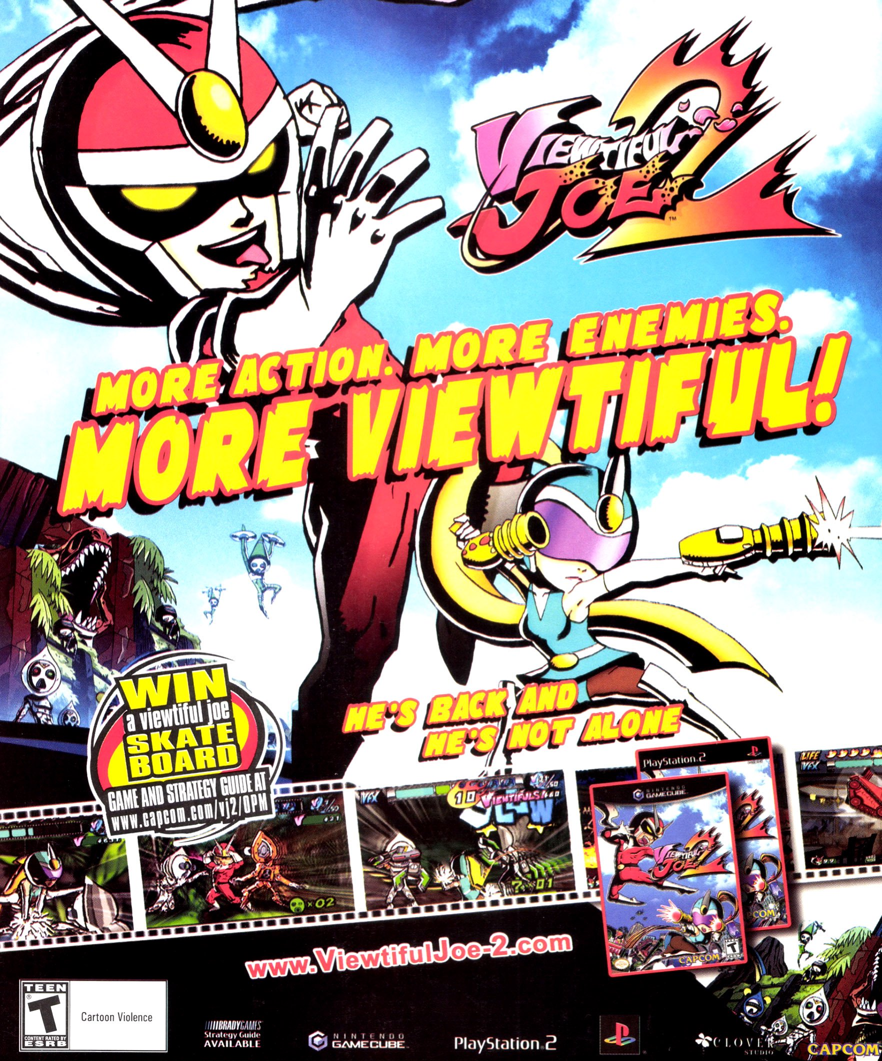
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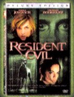

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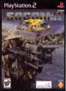
ON THE DVD

TRY BEFORE YOU BUY

Hope you remember your arithmetic, because there's a whole lotta numbers jostling about here. Every demo on this month's disc is a sequel to another game. And we're your only chance to see whether the sequel is better or worse than the original.

PLAY IT



SOCOM II: AFTER HOURS

Hey kids, make your hard drive spin hard for its money by downloading this map right now! Go now! Spin! Read all about it and more on page 128.

ATV OFFROAD FURY 3

Who describes off-road ATV stunts as "fanciful racing"? The disclaimer does. Be as fanciful as you can, and then check out our review on page 111.

VIEWTIFUL JOE 2

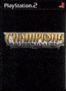
Proof that cheerleaders can indeed be superheroes, too. If you're a cheerleader, this demo also teaches you how to fight robots and dinosaurs.

PRINCE OF PERSIA 2

Did you know that it takes about four normal swings to slay a zombie pirate? Resilient corpses, they are! Learn to efficiently slay them on page 112.

MEGA MAN X8

This demo is chock-full of robo-bees, robo-piranhas, and briskly spoken Japanese speech. You can learn much more about the actual adventure on page 109.



CON: RETURN TO ARMS

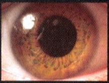
If you're one of the four people who thinks a *Thundercats* game is a good idea, you can play this and pretend your iron sword has the Eye of Thundera.

TMNT 2: BATTLE NEXUS

Don't believe us when we said this sequel is *trés* terrible? Well, if not, then this demo of the shelly ninjas versus evil ninjas will prove our case.

MTV MUSIC GEN 3

Billy Shakes once wrote, "If music be the food of love, play on." P. Diddy once claimed to have invented the remix. That said, do your own remix here.



NOT ENOUGH FOR YOU?

No other playables, but plenty of videos to get you spastically excited over!

WATCH IT

GTA: SAN ANDREAS

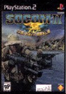
Why are you reading this if you haven't picked up the game? This video is pretty snazzy, but not as snazzy as making your digital CJ a rotund gangsta.

SHADOW HEARTS II

Don't be deceived. This trailer talks about saving souls and secret societies. But it has no warnings of crazed vampiric wrestlers or erotic puppets.

GODZILLA: STE

Sure, you see Godzilla and a whole buncha other monsters here. But where's King Kong? The "draw" from *Godzilla vs. King Kong* needs resolution!



SOCOM II: BOOT CAMP

SOCOM II players who think they're hot dudes get served a heaping piece of humble pie by going through an "easy" version of the SEALs' Hell Week.

the Getaway
Black Monday

PLUS...

Boss man John Davison sounds like all the guys on the *Getaway* video here.

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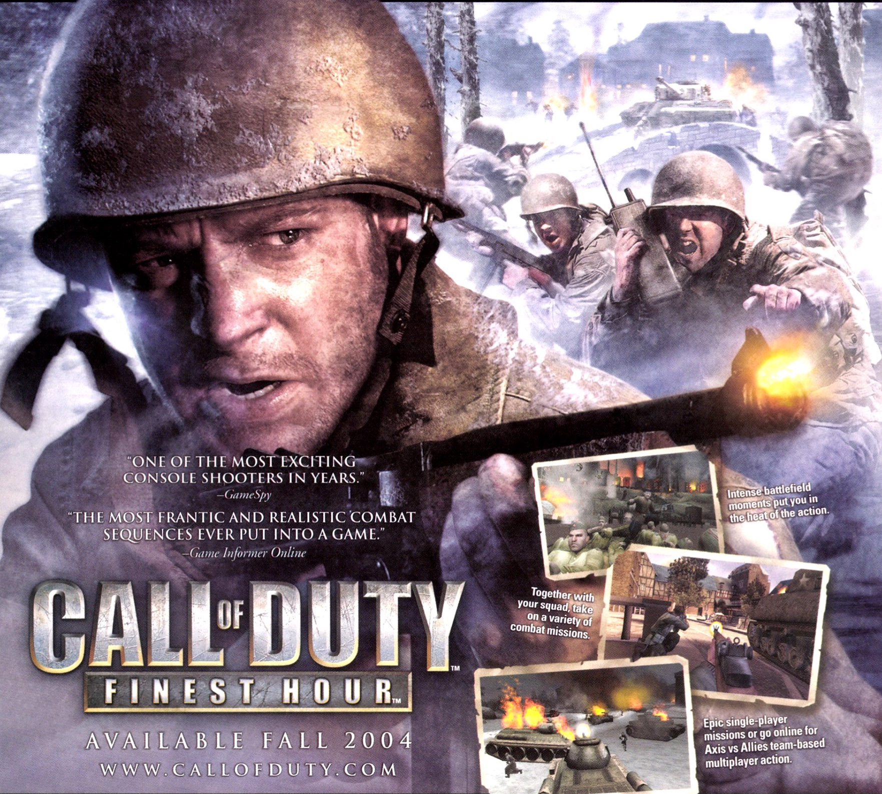

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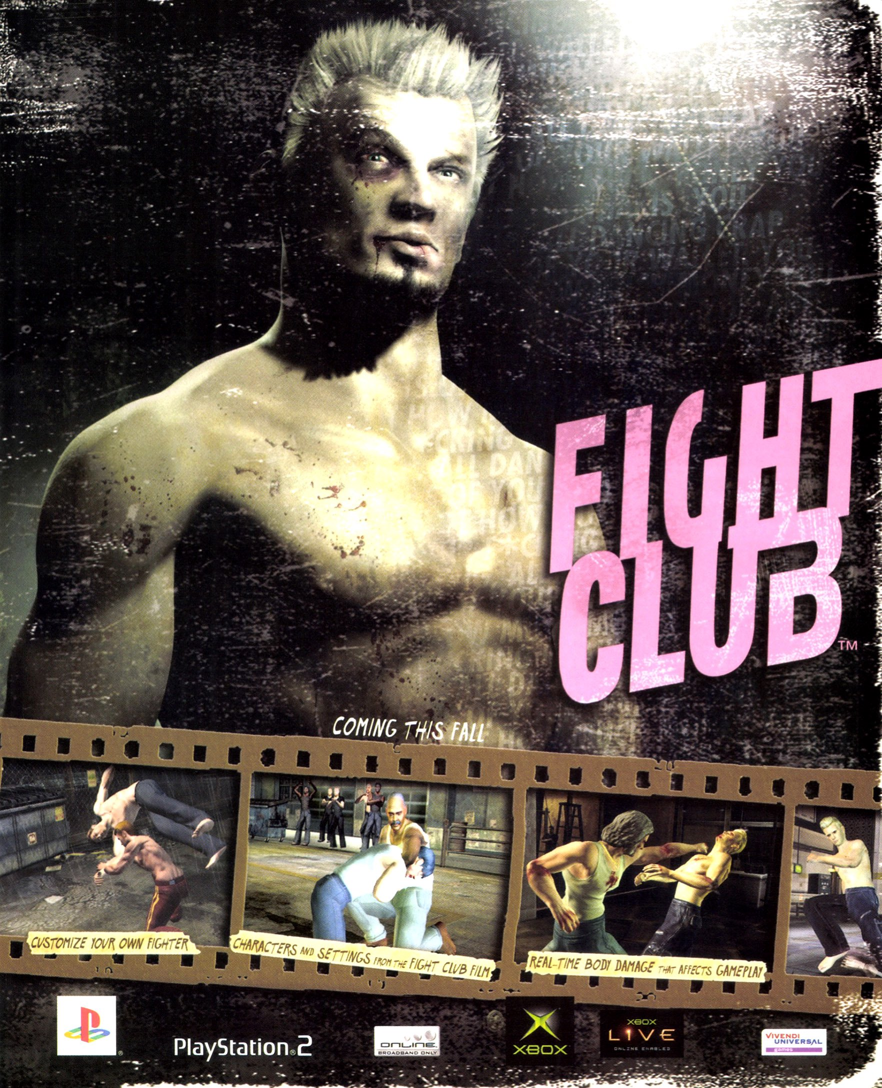
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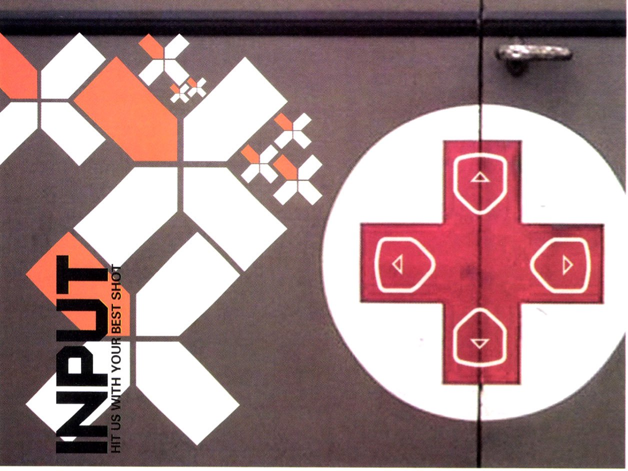

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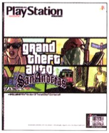

LETTER OF THE MONTH

I felt that I needed to write you and tell you a true story about why you guys and the PS2 are true lifesavers (to me, at least).

In 2001, I was diagnosed with cancer in my right eye; it had to be removed. After surgery and during my long recovery, I fell in a deep depression; I didn't care about anything or anyone, and I wanted to die. My wife called my doctor (Dr. Browning), who said, "What I'm going to say might sound crazy, but just trust me," and told her to buy a PS2 and some games to make me use my mind and not think about everything that was happening to me.

My wife laughed, but she did it anyway. She brought one home and said, "Hey, I got you something, please try it." After a few minutes, I decided to put in *Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty*. And I've been playing ever since.

The next day, she saw your magazine and brought that home, too. I'm still suffering from the bills and the craziness, but I'm alive and well, I love my family, and now I have 32 games and a lot of *OPM*s.

Well, I just wanted to thank you and Sony and the gamemakers for giving my life back to me. To others who have life-threatening illnesses: Gaming might help. I hope that doctors and counselors try what Dr. Browning did for me, and help others like me feel alive inside and eventually get better.

Thanks again, guys.

Paul S. Jenkins
Mooresville, NC

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OPM READERS QUIP BACK

I just finished reading the article "Dream Machine" [*OPM* Issue #86], and I'd like to chime in on the issue of backward compatibility in the PS3. It may not be a top priority for the developers, but I think it can be important to at least a portion of the gamers. Take myself. I have nine systems already (I know I'm not alone here. Packrats, raise your hands!). Backward compatibility is a godsend for gamers like me, because it means I don't have to try and find space for a new system. Sony would do well by its loyal customers by making a PS3 that is fully backward compatible with all PlayStation titles. And make it really work this time. (Not like how I have to hang on to my PS1 because not all of my PSX games work well on my PS2.) For my money and my space, I would consider it most beneficial to have an all-in-one system.

Lindsay
via e-mail

That was a great article in last month's issue about the PS3! However, I have to disagree on the importance of backward compatibility. A PS3 that can play PS2 and PS1 games may not mean much to sports game fans, for example (who wants to play *NFL GameDay '98* when you have *Madden NFL 2005*?), but to RPG fans it's essential. As an RPG fan, I still have my PS1 memory card with its save points for *Final Fantasys VI-IX* and *Chrono Trigger*, and still play them and enjoy them. Also, a backward compatible PS3 would ensure that I could have my

GAMERS ARE TALKING ABOUT

STRAIGHT FROM THE OPM MESSAGE BOARDS

PSP SLAPFIGHT EXTREME!

With all sorts of chatter surrounding the PSP (price rumors, statements from rivals), you gamers have been typing away at each other about it. **68angst** got the ball rolling by reporting, "Nintendo's head of PR says PSP is NOT a game machine; how low can Nintendo get, people??? This is too much—it's hilarious." Sony's Ken Kutaragi came right back and said, "People who want Pikachu will get the new-style DS; people who want *Gran Turismo 4* will get the PSP." Everyone else started jumping in the discussion afterward. "I'm done with portable gaming. I don't take long rides on a bus or train, so I really don't have much use for either," mused **knight_cloak.**

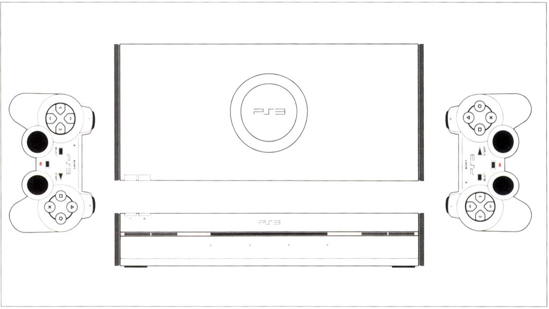
Edgerunner countered with, "This thing is sort of shaking out as a corporate knife fight. That's fine by me. It seems that the console makers and game companies bring their 'A' game when it's all about consumer loyalty (remember Sega vs. Nintendo?) We are the ones who end up winning. For the record, though, Kutaragi has my vote. I won't be spending any flight time messing about with Pikachu; I'll be apexing turns in *GT* on my PSP."

Yakityyakblah summarized the portables themselves: "This is very simple. If you want a PSP, then take a Game Boy, improve the graphics, and tie on a CD player and USB movie player (if such a thing exists). If you want a DS, take a Game Boy, tie it to a Palm Pilot and another Game Boy, put one Game Boy on the map screen, then start poking at your Palm Pilot and hope your other Game Boy does something."

GTA OPM

Now that most of the free world has immersed itself in *GTA: San Andreas*, people are already gabbing about what should be in the next game. **Botkiller** made a modest request for "Full hard drive support." **SoulTakerX** has a bold wish: "Geo-Mod type stuff for the entire city. Fire a rocket into a building and a piece of it blows up." Zany **black_13** quipped, "Well, it's pretty obvious to see that the next one will be a futuristic type like *GTA2*. They can't do this past theme forever. And the No. 1 request I'm sure is on everyone's mind is multiplayer! Heck, they could probably even turn it into a MMOAG, massively multi-player online action game. Imagine the possibilities."

GregTheRad provided the tersest, yet best suggestion: "Robots. Definitely robots."



entire Square Enix collection on a single console; this alone would be an excellent selling point for the PS3!

There are other legitimate reasons for backward compatibility: There are still PS2 and PS1 games sitting on store shelves that new PS3 owners could buy, even if it's the first Sony console they've ever owned. And those who collect and play older videogames for kicks would be able to do so on a single console.

A videogame console that's not backward compatible is like a color TV that can't play black-and-white movies.

Chad Harris
via e-mail

In your November issue, one of the articles is about the PS3, and one of the bigger font-size quotes says, "It's not necessary to watch movies on a game machine," [which] really ticked me off. The only reason I bought a PlayStation 2 was to play *GTA3, Vice City, Marvel vs. Capcom 2,* and watch DVDs. Buying a PS2 eliminated the need to buy another machine for watching DVDs, and I could still play my favorite games on it.

Steven J. Grenleski
via e-mail

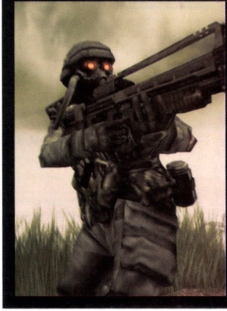
A lot of you really like the DVD playback and backward compatibility of the PS2, as these three letters are just a sample of a massive influx of desired PS3 features. All we can say is that we expect Sony and its crack team of wonder engineers to create a system that'll satisfy all of us. Or something.

WELCOME TO 1995!

Hello. I've been reading your magazine for almost a year now, and there are some things I

GOING UNDERGROUND

THE ONLY MAG WITH PLAYABLE DEMOS



IN THE ZONE

I just played the *Killzone* demo and was mildly impressed; the smoke effects were stellar. My problem: SERIOUS aliasing problems—need to get rid of those jaggies (which I'm hoping they did to a significant degree). The controls were a little tough to get used to, but once I did, it flowed smoothly. I might rent it once or twice.

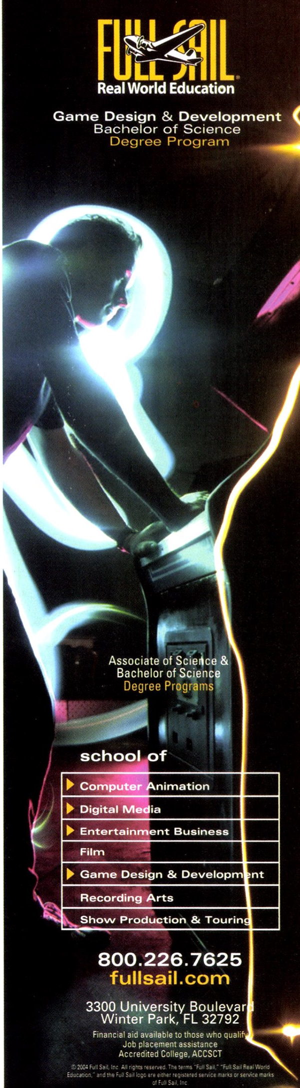
ZEROAEROPLANE33
via the message board

I was expecting *Medal of Honor*–like gameplay but got something like a mix of *Red Faction 2* and *Halo*. It's a decent-looking game with some intense gunfights. The sound is nice, and the A.I. isn't that dumb. Let me warn you, though, the action is intense.

TIGERMAN4002
via the message board

Killzone was cool, but what's with the demo resetting? That sucks. It just went to the menu all of a sudden. Why a time limit on that game? The art direction was amazing, though, and it was fairly hard. Well...no it wasn't. The shield was too damage absorbent.

LUMINOUSAETHER
via the message board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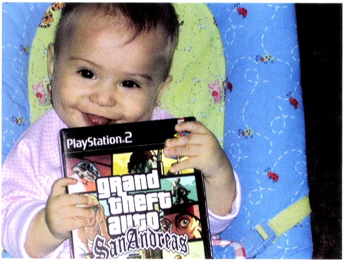

PlayStation.2
grand theft auto San Andreas

would like to point out. First of all, you should know that I do not own a PS2; however, I do own a new PS1. I got it last Christmas as a gift. For years I've been interested in the PlayStation franchise, and now I own one. But there are some major disappointments from your magazine that I've noticed. The main problem, I think, is that the original PlayStation is not mentioned enough. Now, of course I realize that my system is very old and not many new, exciting features are left to be made for it compared to the PS2, but I still feel that it is a noteworthy system, and I am asking that you post more lists and reviews about it because I cannot find much news on my system almost anywhere. The PS2 is a revolutionary system, and I will seriously consider buying one once the price comes down a tad bit more, but why must this magazine feel it must post only PS2 stuff? I only ask that you post more things about my system, considering its place in videogame history is huge!

I realize that this letter will probably not affect the magazine's content despite any of my single pleadings, but I feel that I must tell you this, considering your magazine's reviews and ratings for my games usually prove right and that is why I like this magazine. So, I hope you will do something about this, but if not, well, perhaps I really need to buy a PS2 instead of holding out for my aging system. Thank you and please write back a reply or show results in your magazine if you wish.

Jonathan Hand
via e-mail

Er, well, we don't really cover new PS1 happenings because there really aren't any. We're generally completists when it comes to reviews, and we'll review the odd *Madden* or 989 game that still kicks it on the PS1, but otherwise, we don't write about it because there's nothing to write. There will occasionally be a retro feature in Replay, but otherwise, you'd have to go to old issues or the review archive for PS1 stuff.

GTA: SA IS KID-FRIENDLY

I picked up my preordered copy *GTA: San Andreas* on release day at the local Rhino Video Games, but before I could enjoy it, my 7-month-old daughter Elexis got to it.

Eric Anderson
via e-mail

Congratulations on helping your daughter start a life of crime early! You'll regret this when she's on the news in 13 years shrieking something about taking turf for the Orange Grove.

NOT ON PAY-PER-VIEW

Well, finally, Sammy releases *Sammy vs. Capcom* in arcades in Tokyo, Japan. While we don't know if the game will ever come to the States, there are a lot of games that I'd still like to see:

1) *Sammy vs. Capcom*
2) *Sammy vs. SNK*
3) *SNK vs. Capcom 2: Final Chaos*
4) *Namco vs. Sega*
5) *Tecmo vs. Sega*
6) *Namco vs. Tecmo*
7) *Marvel vs. DC*
8) *Marvel vs. Capcom 3*
9) *Capcom vs. DC*
10) *Midway vs. Studio Gigante*
11) *EA vs. Vivendi Universal*
12) *Sega vs. Nintendo*
13) *Street Fight 4: Battle of the World*

Omar Galloza
Meriden, CT

A lot of those proposed-but-never-made titles sound nifty, but you overlooked the much-anticipated-yet-never-made fighter *Bear vs. Shark*.

YOU SURE YOU GOT THE RIGHT ADDRESS?

I thought my book was stolen but infact it was just late I allso got an idea put A tracking device on the books with their address on it to tell one frome another.

P.S Vance Brown Junior think you for your time

Vance Brown
via e-mail

You're very welcome! This sounds so ingenious that we're sending a copy of this letter verbatim straight to Donald Trump! We're confident that you'll soon become a captain of industry! «

ASK US ANYTHING
AND WE'LL ANSWER

CAREER COUNSELING

Q. Hey, what's up, *OPM*? I'm a high school student and was thinking about a future career. Videogames have always been a big part of my life. During my time in school, writing has always been something I'm good at. I was just curious to know how to become a writer in *OPM*. Could someone help me out?

Steve Burns
vie e-mail

A. Normally, we would reply to this typical question with an answer along the lines of "Stay in school until you feel too cool for school" and "Learn to read-n-rite real good." But today, our advice for breaking into the gaming press is: "Drink up, son, drink up." Milk, that is. What did you think we meant?

PASSION OF THE MEL

Q. Do you guys know Mel Gibson's phone number? I have always wanted to chat with him. He's ever so brilliant. Thanks! FREEDOM!

Cody
via e-mail

A. This will become one of those hilariously rare moments when we answer questions with other questions. This time, we ask, "Why would you want to talk to Mel after the controversial travesty that was *Man without a Face*?"

BREAK TIME

Q. What happened to *Chrono Break*?

Matt
via e-mail

A. It died before it could even be born.

MOVIES MOVIES MOVIES!

Q. I was searching for movie info for *Silent Hill* and *Metal Gear Solid*, and I saw that BOTH ideas were being pitched. Do you know anything about this?!

Nick Peer
via e-mail

A. *Silent Hill* was optioned and is in preproduction right now. *Metal Gear Solid* wasn't. Kojima would be crying in his beer if he weren't laughing because he's already a multimillionaire.

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BLOG OF THE MONTH

"You're wondering why I'm comparing an old game (*Shenmue*) to a new game (*San Andreas*)? Well, it's obvious. Both series of games attempt to create massive environments populated by all sorts of people, giving a player lots to explore. [...]

"*GTA* isn't as original as some people may think. It may be new to the people [who] have never played the games I've mentioned, but the fact that Rockstar took all these modes of gameplay and tossed it into one is why everyone thinks it's the ultimate game. It's the assimilation of good gameplay, making them interrelate, functioning in a big simulation and putting a spin on things that makes a game like *San Andreas*."

Albert Art
rez2cool.1UP.com

CLUB OF THE MONTH

"A club devoted to the DVD platform. Discussions include movies, players, aspect ratios, and all things DVD. Here you'll find inside info on the latest releases, places where you can find great DVD deals, and more! Curious to know when a specific DVD is planned for release? Post your inquiry here; our insiders stay on top of all new releases."

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"The alert level has been raised to RED!"

"Scored 9.0, 9.5 And 10 Out Of 10. Awarded Editor's Choice: Gold"
-Electronic Gaming Monthly

"MGS3 Looks Astounding, From Its Inspiration To Its Story To Its Gameplay."
-GameSpy.com

"5 Out Of 5"
-Official PlayStation Magazine

"10 Out Of 10"
-PlayStation Magazine

"The Finest Installment In Konami's Acclaimed Stealth-Espionage Series."
-Electronic Gaming Monthly

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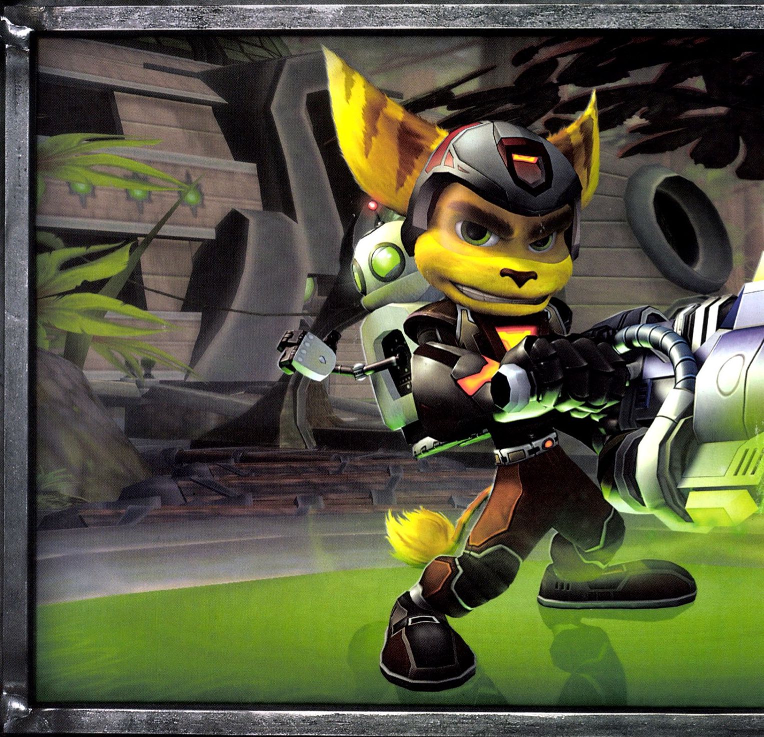

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PlayStation 2

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Fantasy Violence

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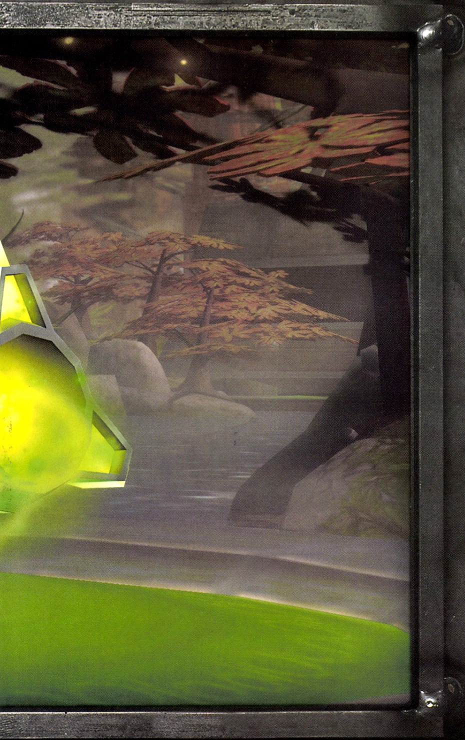

RATCHET & CLANK 3
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5 FOR 2K5

WHAT YOU SHOULD BE PLAYING NEXT YEAR

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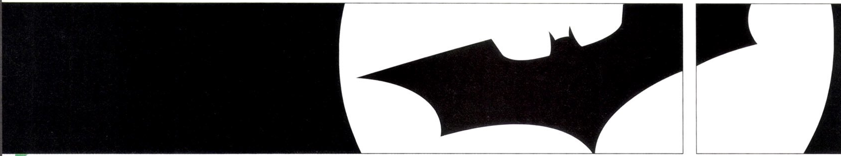
BATMAN'S BOSS

WARNER BROS. INTERACTIVE'S JASON HALL IS FED UP AND HE'S NOT GOING TO TAKE IT ANYMORE



Warner Bros. Interactive's senior vice president, Jason Hall, turned the videogame industry on its head by announcing a new plan that not only helps the Warner Bros. label become synonymous with quality but also punishes licensees for making bad games. With the announcement of a new Batman game for PS2, we asked Jason how this new policy will be implemented and how it will affect the parties involved.

OPM Can you explain Warner Bros.' new licensing policy?

JASON HALL We want to improve the overall quality of games that are associated with Warner Bros. Essentially, in its roughest terms, the licensing we're working with needs to achieve at least a 70 percent aggregate [reviews] average, and that average can be computed a number of ways. If they want to use a site like Gamerankings or Metacritic, [they can]. In some cases, we've had companies choose five or six major sites and then create an average from those that we all agree on. The whole point is to have some sort of measure other than sales to denote quality and for them to hit a minimum standard.

OPM What was the final straw that made you want to implement such a policy?

JH I'm new to the organization. I got here in January from the videogame industry—I founded a company called Monolith. Essentially, I've seen over the last decade how publishers have handled these properties. I also have a lot of experience dealing with publishers and developers because Monolith Productions is a development house, and I understand the very nature of how change needs to occur if you're trying to create positive change from a quality perspective.

So when I got to Warner Bros., we all sat down and had a discussion about what's important to the studio. And what's important to the studio is that the properties that it owns are viewed as premium in whatever space they're taken into, so when they take a major film like *The Matrix* and move it to TV, it's handled in a premium fashion. I know intrinsically that film-licensed videogames are viewed as secondary to original properties.

Let's say you're looking at the shelf and see a box for a film-licensed game and a box for an original game. You're assuming that the film-licensed game is exploitive by nature, and therefore it's of subpar quality when compared to an original one. Ninety percent of the reviews for a film-based videogame—if it's a good game—they always say, "Wow, considering it's a film license...." I think people are so surprised by it.

For Warner Bros. to preserve its future, it's important that the properties it has are premium in the space they're taken into. Each time you play a videogame associated with Warner Bros., it needs to be perceived as high quality. There are a number of steps to get there, and it's not all one-sided. It's not so much that they come up and ask for the license and we ask for the 70 percent and we're done. There are a number of things Warner Bros. has to live up to on its side in order for that policy to remain in effect. For instance, if you're a licensee and you don't get the script soon enough or some of the art assets until six months before you're supposed to ship, you can't make a good game. It's not the developers' fault and you can't hold them to some sort of policy, so it's a two-way street on this. If Warner Bros. doesn't live up to its promised obligations, then the policy can't be enforced.

OPM Well, let's say both parties have lived up to their end of the agreement—going into the release, you think it's going to do well, but it doesn't receive good reviews. Don't you think you're taking a risk by depending on what reviewers think?

JH You'd think so when you phrase it like that, but it turns out that because videogames are reviewed like consumer products and not like movies, it's a big difference. If games were reviewed like movies, this kind of system couldn't work because no matter how hard you try, you cannot consistently get the same rating. Look at *The Matrix*: The first *Matrix* movie got reviewed one way and the second *Matrix* movie didn't get reviewed the same way, but all of the elements were the same. Everything was the same, but the story was moved forward. Now look at something like *Madden*. EA can repeatedly get a minimum rating each time because there's a certain set of features that is expected of a particular videogame in a particular genre, and if you hit it, you're able to sustain an aggregate average.

What's interesting is—and we did all kinds of analysis on this before we implemented it—let's say two movies come out and they're both science-fiction movies. One is *Star Wars* and the other is *Gattaca*. *Star Wars* has spaceships, jumps to lightspeed, and lightsabers, so *Gattaca* would get trashed because people would ask, "How can you have a space movie without spaceships?" Now in the videogame space, they'll do contemporary comparisons all day long. In *Grand Theft Auto*, you have the ability to open a car door, but in [a *GTA* clone] you can't open a door, so the clone automatically gets downgraded two points.

"WE WANT A MEASURE OTHER THAN SALES TO DENOTE QUALITY."

OPM If you have a reviewer that gives the game a 6 out of 10 but the general public thinks it's a really great game and it sells really well, whom do you give the priority to—the reviewer or the consumer?

JH No one reviewer can move the aggregate. You would have to pay off 20 or 30 major gaming entities across the world, not just in North America, to throw off the average. It's not like the game comes out and we instantly count the first reviews. We wait a number of months after the game's launch for the world to have decided. Reviewers in Sweden are going to feel differently than reviewers elsewhere. On the average, it's reflective on the general perception of quality, so if you look at something like *Enter the Matrix*, it has an average of 68 or 67, and that's pretty much what it was. Certainly, there are some reviews in there that give it 90s and there are reviews that give it 20s—it's all over the place. But it actually turns out to be a decent system.

It's important to know that there isn't an automatic penalization [against licensees]. Yes, they'll be economically penalized if they don't meet the standard, but we're not interested in trying to get more money out of it. The last thing we want to do is penalize anyone, because it's bad for relations. We always reserve the right to waive the penalty. What if the developers try a daring design? Like *PaRappa the Rapper*—reviewers could look at it and say it's horrible, but you don't want to penalize the developers for creativity and trying to stretch design. If it turns out that people just don't like it, then that's a different argument.

OPM So there is an internal mechanism that determines game quality?

JH Absolutely. Let's say someone has a game that comes in at 60, so we'll have a meeting with the publisher and talk about it. We'll say, "You know, guys, you couldn't get Pierce Brosnan fast enough, so that ruined us, and this is the cataclysmic effect it had on our game." We're looking specifically for exploitive behavior where the game isn't quite ready enough, and we know it and they know it, but they want to ride that marketing campaign so bad that they put it out anyway. They could do that before because there was no penalty. There was nothing to lose that way. Now, if they go into it knowing that they're going to score under [the requirement], it turns the economics upside down because it makes more sense for them to invest more into the product and make it better.

OPM Is that what happened with *Catwoman*?

JH *Catwoman*, as a deal, existed before I got here, and when we put this policy into effect, we decided not to change deals made in the past. That kind of thing can't happen now, but it was already well in motion by the time we got around to changing a number things about Warner Bros. and the way it handles the interactive space. Although the game was not the game it should've been, EA worked very hard in a very compressed time scale. If I was here back then, I would not have let the deal be made, because there wasn't enough time to make the game.

"I WOULD NOT HAVE LET CATWOMAN BE MADE."

OPM Do you ever second-guess the decision to let EA handle *Batman*?

JH No, because I feel like the *Catwoman* deal shouldn't have been made just based on the [time frame] alone. It's not really EA's fault that *Catwoman* was what it was. I think the blame for that one is shared equally among everyone involved with the product. On the other hand, there's much more time for *Batman*, and it's a different name.

All new deals will have the quality standard moving forward. There are no exceptions, so any new announcement you see coming from us—it's all in there. We're not going to push our licenses on anyone, [and if it turns out] that no one wants to sign up for them, then we'll have to make the games ourselves. Until the idea of this policy came up, there was no forum for a studio and a publisher to discuss why a game was bad. What happened is that they'd ask for a property and say they would do great. Then they'd make the game and say it was bad, and the studio would say it was bad. There was no contractual obligation to have a discussion.

I've worked on licenses [as a developer] with *Aliens vs. Predator*, so I know what it's like to work with a studio. We changed here at Warner Bros. to accommodate publishing needs so publishers can produce the best game that they can, but don't ask us to do all this work if you're not willing to back it up. «

MONOLITHIC RÉSUMÉ

Monolith Productions, the company founded by Jason Hall, may not be terribly familiar to PS2 owners, but it's been a major force in the PC world for years. The company was responsible for top-tier first-person shooters like *No One Lives Forever*, *Tron 2.0*, and *Aliens vs. Predator 2*, eventually licensing out its LithTech engine for use in other big FPS titles. The company is currently developing *The Matrix Online*, due for release in 2005.

DATA STREAM
NEWS IN BRIEF

THE EVIL RETURNS

In a surprising turn of events, Capcom has announced that *Resident Evil 4* will be coming to PS2 in 2005. The game was formerly announced as a GameCube-only project, but citing the current financial situation of the company and the market in general, Capcom decided to make a PS2 version as well. "We have come to this conclusion after deliberating over customers' needs, market environments, and various opinions from stakeholders such as shareholders and investors," the company said in a written statement. "We hope that this decision will create new demand and expand [*Resident Evil*'s] fan base. "At the same time, we also expect that the decision will bring about additional revenue base."

ORDER THE HIT

IO Interactive is working on yet another *Hitman* game, this one called *Hitman: Blood Money*. Agent 47 will be the hunted instead of the hunter this time as some unknown force continues to murder members of his contract agency. As the title suggests, money plays an important role in the game, affecting what you do and see. Additionally, the game is running on a new version of IO Interactive's Glacier engine, so you can expect it to have even more visual bells and whistles than the previous *Hitman* game. *Blood Money* is scheduled for release on PlayStation 2 in spring 2005.

THE FORCE IS STRONG

Be prepared for a *Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith* multimedia bombardment in May. The game, in development at The Collective and based on the film, is a third-person action extravaganza following the adventures of Obi-Wan Kenobi and Anakin Skywalker. Both will have access to lightsabers and a variety of force powers that they can use over the course of their journey, which will culminate in an epic lightsaber duel between the two characters. If you think that's a spoiler, well, here's another one for you: Darth Vader is Luke's father.

LIVE BY THE SWORD

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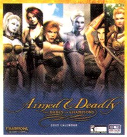

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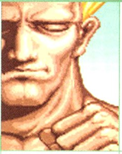
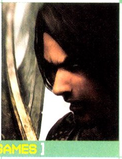
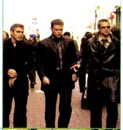
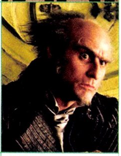
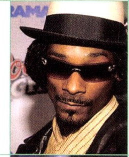
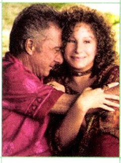
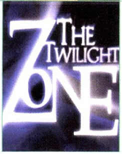
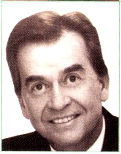
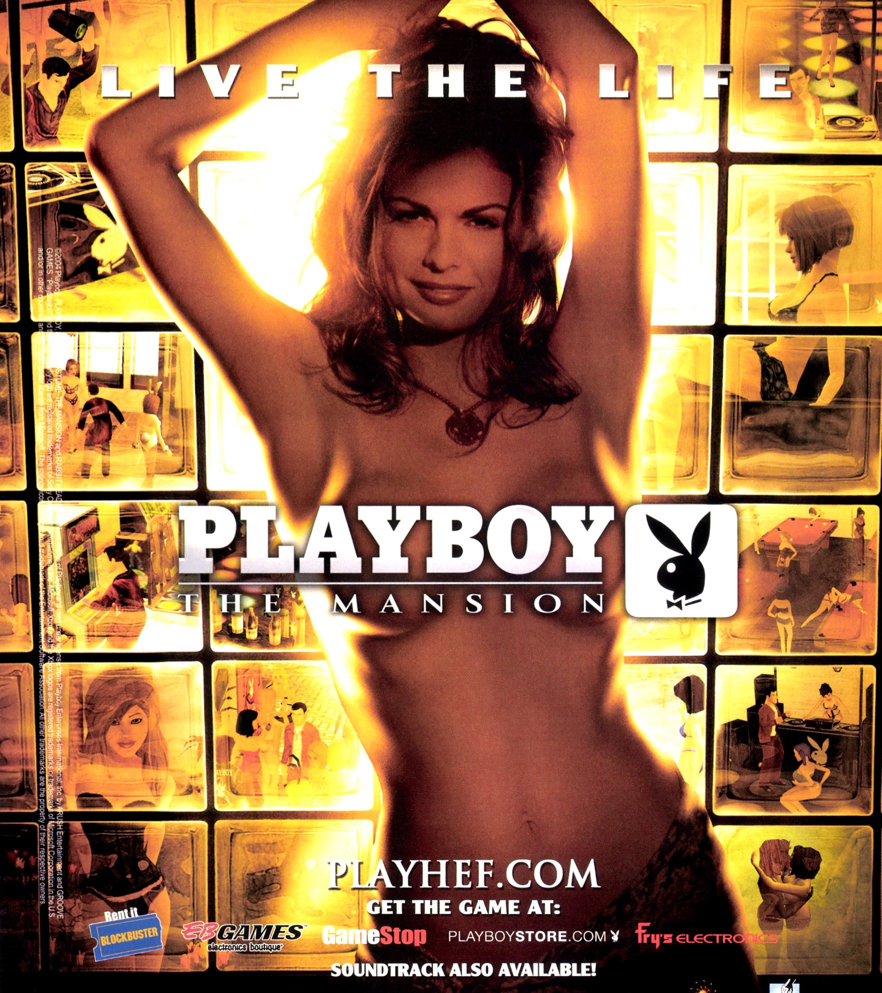
THE MONTH AHEAD FOR YOU AND YOUR PLAYSTATION 2

SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THUR	FRI	SAT
			01 ***ChoroQ, Kuon***, and ***Street Fighter Arcade*** are now available for your gaming pleasure. [NEW GAMES]		03	04 If you liked *Hero*, then go check out director Yimou's newest film—***House of Flying Daggers*** hits theaters this weekend.
05	06 ***Battle Assault 3, Mega Man X8, Prince of Persia: Warrior Within***, and ***Viewtiful Joe 2*** are all in stores this week. [NEW GAMES]		08 Last night was the first of eight crazy nights. **Happy Hanukkah**. 	09	10 Don't have enough money for the avalanche of games that came out in the past month? Go see ***Ocean's Twelve*** to get some quick money-making tips.	
12 Huge lines are filing out of every gaming store in Japan—**PSP** comes out today. 	13 Is *OPM* the best gaming magazine in the country? Watch the **Video Game Awards** tomorrow night on Spike TV (hosted by Snoop Dogg) to find out.	14 Hardcore racing fans across the country fake being sick—***Gran Turismo 4*** is in stores. [NEW GAMES]	15	16 L.A. citizens can go see the **Black Eyed Peas** tomorrow night at the Key Club. Listen closely and you might hear some of those Simlish lyrics.	17 Watch Jim Carrey in ***Lemony Snicket's A Series of Unfortunate Events***, then check out the PS2 game of the same name.	
19		21	22 Only three shopping days till Christmas. Have you picked up ***Ratchet & Clank: Up Your Arsenal*** and ***Katamari Damacy*** for loved ones yet?		24 Meet Ben Stiller's movie parents Barbra Streisand and Dustin Hoffman in ***Meet the Fockers***.	25 Have yourself a merry little **Christmas**.
26		28 It's good to be a sci-fi geek: ***Battlestar Galactica*** and ***The Twilight Zone*** Season 1 hit store shelves today, following ***Star Trek, Star Trek: Voyager***, and ***Quantum Leap*** DVD releases earlier in the month.	29		31 Dick Clark wants you to have a rockin' **New Year's Eve**.	



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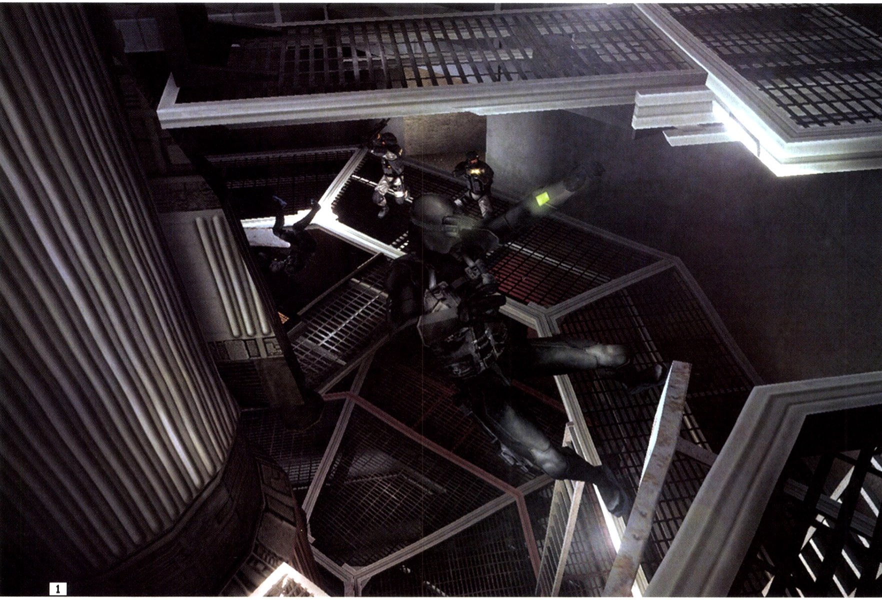

1

PS2: 2K5

DECENT GAMES ALL YEAR ROUND, WE'RE PROMISED

01 Splinter Cell Chaos Theory
02 Area 51
03 Batman Begins
04 Brothers in Arms
05 God of War
06 Champions: Return to Arms
07 Death by Degrees
08 Destroy All Humans
09 Devil May Cry 3
10 Fullmetal Alchemist
11 Getaway: Black Monday
12 Darkwatch
13 Hitman: Blood Money
14 Killer 7
15 Mercenaries
16 Midnight Club 3
17 Nanobreaker
18 NARC
19 NFL Street 2
20 Phantom Crash 2050
21 Playboy: The Mansion
22 Project: Snowblind
23 Resident Evil Outbreak File #2
24 Rise of the Kasai
25 Shadow of Rome
26 Spy vs. Spy
27 Tekken 5
28 Stolen
29 Suikoden IV
30 Super Money Ball DX
31 Star Wars Ep. III
32 The Punisher
33 TimeSplitters FP
34 Virtua Quest
35 Xenosaga II
36 Winnie the Pooh

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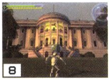

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The 2004 holiday gaming season was just about as good as it gets for PS2 owners. The confluence of megahits in the October to December period was unlike anything that's ever happened before. When you factor in the whole gaming market, with the launch of the Nintendo DS, the ultimate expression of Xboxness in the shape of *Halo 2*, and Nintendo's last-ditch attempt to make the GameCube cool with *Metroid Prime 2*, it was a true wallet-buster. So what now? Is that it? Do we have to sit it out and wait for the PS3 before we'll see games of the same magnitude? With so many triple-A games just launched, is there anything to look forward to next year? Fortunately, it would seem so, and the first batch of confirmed games can be seen in the screenshots we have here. Starting on page 36, we've picked out five games that we expect will make the biggest noise in the first part of the year. We gathered a group of executives from around the game business to discuss the coming year and to question the wisdom of such a packed holiday season.

"It's a bit of a misnomer to say Christmas is the time to launch games," explains Midway's senior vice president of marketing, Steve Allison. "The best thing to say is that Christmas is the best time to launch big franchise-game sequels. That's franchise sequels, not just sequels. So if you have *GTA* on your hands, there's some upside to being in the Christmas season, as it becomes a retail event. These titles would do well regardless of when they ship, but they tend to do slightly better by hitting their mark in the holiday season when nongamers are out shopping. Kids' games are good at that time too, since they sell 70 percent of their yearly volume in the fourth quarter."

Eidos' vice president of marketing, Paul Baldwin, adds, "It's not rocket science; it's all about when people are spending the most money. People spend more money during the holidays than any other quarter, and that's true for any consumer product for the most part."

"Holidays are huge for all the obvious reasons," explains Electronic Arts' vice president of corporate communications, Jeff Brown. "You get more spontaneous purchases, and you have people giving gifts. The other thing you have to remember is that you get a spike in hardware sales around the holidays too, and typically, you see an average of two games going out the door with a new console, whether they're part of a bundle or not. That's something you don't see as much during the rest of the year."

IS THERE ANYTHING TO LOOK FORWARD TO NEXT YEAR?

He goes on to explain an aspect of the holiday buying season that you may not be aware of. "Typically, the two weeks after Christmas are bigger than the two weeks before," Brown declares. Why is that? Is it simply a matter of cold, hard cash as a holiday gift? "Well, yes," he concedes, "but the other big thing is that they take back all the junk that they didn't want and exchange it for videogames."

"Here's a myth," says Allison, defiantly. "It's that nonfranchise titles or new intellectual properties will benefit from the Christmas season. Well, in a season that's not rich with big franchise releases, that might be the case, but in general, there are always key franchises hitting the Christmas window that make the market conditions suicide for new IPs or nonfranchise

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SHOOT 'EM UP

2005 will certainly be a big year for shooter fans. *Area 51* (2) is at the top of our list for pure FPS action, but it's joined by numerous others including Crystal Dynamics' "no, it's not a *Deus Ex* shooter, honest" *Project: Snowblind* (22) and EA's take on the *TimeSplitters* franchise (33).

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WHY DON'T WE SEE A STEADY FLOW OF HIGH-QUALITY GAMES?

games, even if they're of tremendous quality. There are always exceptions to the rule, like the occasional title destined to be a franchise, like *GTA3* or *Splinter Cell*, but this is the exception, not the rule. Publishers that can be honest about where their title sits in the hierarchy of releases can really fine-tune things for maximum success." But how many publishers really are capable of honestly evaluating their game's place in the hierarchy? Just look at the games reviewed this month and ask yourself how many might be better served by a gentle nudge into next year.

"The games business has grown to the point where a blockbuster title can be released at any time of year," argues Jay Cohen, vice president of publishing for Ubisoft. "To say it is perilous to release a game in the first quarter is an antiquated point of view that compares the entertainment software business to the toy industry," Cohen adds. "That's just not the definitive case anymore.

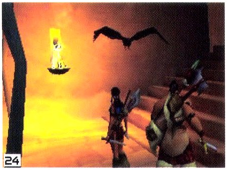
"What we can't ever forget is that hardcore gamers don't stop buying and playing games, ever," says Brown. "The real epiphany for us at EA was when we released *Medal of Honor: Frontline* in May a couple of years ago. Everyone told us, 'Nobody plays games in the summer.' Nonsense! The average age of our consumers is 27; it's not like they conform to this notion that they're going outside to play on their swing set when the weather is nice and they got out of school. May is big because you have a lot of people graduating from school and college, and then June is Father's Day. They call the period 'dads and grads.' I didn't call it that, it's a retail thing."

"The single most important factor influencing game sales is simply the quality of the game itself," states John Geoghegan, vice president of marketing at LucasArts. "Timing is secondary. That being said, if you're confident you have a strong title, you next look to when you can successfully showcase it. *Mercenaries* is a new IP, so we wanted to launch it at a time when we'd have a better chance of grabbing people's attention."

"Great games backed by strong launches can shine early in the year," Midway's Allison states. "It's clear that the holidays can actually hurt a lot of quality games because they had to battle for the attention of gamers in an extremely noisy time," he says. "So where this choice of timing comes into play as an important release strategy is when you objectively know you've got a very high quality new game that's not a sequel. Generally, you'll come to the conclusion that Q1 or Q2 is better for the first iteration. If that plays out to the positive and it becomes a success, the sequel will be best with a release around the holiday season in whatever year the follow-up comes."

So, why don't we see a steady flow of high-quality games throughout the year? "There is a steady flow of high-quality games throughout the year," argues Ubisoft's Cohen. "However, the problem seems to be that there's just not an abundance of them. Many publishers do not have more than one or two triple-A titles in their entire lineup, but they all want to have a strong title in their lineup during the holidays."

"It has taken a while, but you are seeing big releases outside of the Q4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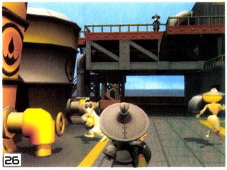
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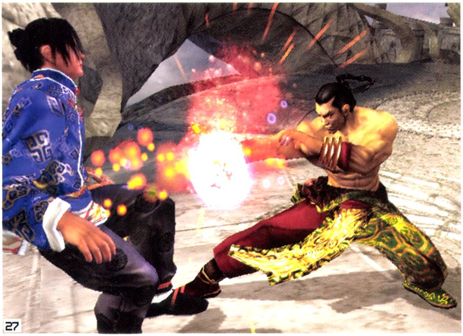
TEKKEN BACK THE FIGHTING CROWN

Tekken (27) has had a pretty lousy time of it on PS2. Once the darling of the fighting-game scene, it has deteriorated with each new iteration since *Tag Tournament*. The biggest challenge for *Tekken 5* is whether the "two guys thumping each other" formula has already peaked.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window already," argues Eidos' Baldwin. "Last year you had *Bond*, *Splinter Cell*, and *Hitman: Contracts* all ship in the first half of the year. This is definitely becoming more common."

A lot of games on the release schedule for early 2005 were originally scheduled to ship in late 2004. Is this the first sign that game releases will be dispersed more sensibly throughout the year? "The decision to move *Mercenaries* into January 2005 was made during the summer of 2004 when we had a good understanding of what the competitive environment would look like," LucasArts' Geoghegan explains. "We knew we would have a hit with *Battlefront* in September, and we had big plans for the sequel to *Knights of the Old Republic*, so it made sense to launch *Mercenaries* in early January, when it would have a clear shot at breaking out."

"Once we knew that *Halo 2* and *GTA: San Andreas* wouldn't slip—because there was a strong chance both would for a while—we realigned our thinking around what was best for establishing *Area 51* as a franchise," explains Midway's Allison. "That meant getting away from the noise of those two high-profile releases. The good thing about it for consumers is that we added an additional 12 weeks to the production schedule to polish the game and get multiplayer online dialed in just right, which is great for PS2 owners, as there are not really many good FPS choices that work well online for more than eight players."

Eidos' Baldwin describes the same challenge with regard to the new shooter from Crystal Dynamics, *Project: Snowblind*. "The decision was made to push it into 2005 shortly after E3 last year," he says. "We knew we had a competitive shooter, but with the glut of them coming out in 2004, we decided we would rather give it some room."

"We decided to move *Splinter Cell Chaos Theory* into early 2005 last summer," Ubisoft's Cohen admits. "We knew that in order to deliver the features that the franchise demands, it was necessary to spend more time engineering and refining it so that it lives up to the promise."

So, it's safe to say 2005 will be quite different from what we've been used to recently? "Perhaps," ponders Cohen. "Console transition years have proven time and again to throw conventional thinking out the window. With new hardware being introduced at various points throughout the year and prices declining on current-generation software and hardware, it is unlikely that the typical cycles will be evident in 2005."

WILL GAME RELEASES BE DISPERSED THROUGHOUT THE YEAR?

"The games industry does itself a disservice by crowding so many titles into the holiday season," LucasArts' Geoghegan says, ably concluding our discussion. "The herd mentality only results in serious overgrazing. That's an OK way to raise cattle, but not a sustainable model for videogames. 2005 will be different. The majority of gamers are spending their hard-earned dollars on videogames during the fourth quarter right now, but just look at the movie industry. They've successfully built a business around two major selling periods: summer and fall. At the same time, they are able to release a lot of smaller but still successful films during the interim period. The videogame industry will eventually move in this direction. Believe me, it won't have a choice, economics will force the move." «

SPLINTER CELL CHAOS THEORY

STEALTH-ACTION GETS REFINED

Pub. Ubisoft **Dev.** Ubisoft Montreal/Ubisoft Annecy **Release** March

Admit it, stealth fans: Eventually, you're going to get tired of eating defenseless woodland creatures and endlessly switching camouflage. Eventually, you're going to want to step back out of the '60s and move into a more modern setting. Eventually, you're going to want to test your stealth skills against other humans.

Never fear, Ubisoft has got your number. (It's "three"—or, at least, it would be if the *Splinter Cell* series followed normal numbering conventions.) With *Chaos Theory*, the newest entry in the near-future adventures of lone operative Sam Fisher, Ubisoft hopes to further refine the superspy stealth gameplay that's made the franchise such a success, and in the process, deal out one of the key titles of 2005.

This refining process goes a bit beyond the standard "new levels/weapons/gadgets" routine, though. "While the concept of stealth-action remains the same," says Producer Mathieu Ferland, "almost everything else has been changed: new graphics engine, new sound engine, rag-doll physics, all-new A.I., new level design, new animations, and the 'closer

than ever' system, which forces players to operate in extreme proximity to their enemies."

You can think of this "closer than ever" system as being roughly analogous to *MGS3*'s close-quarters combat. Sam now has a repertoire of up-close-and-personal attacks in addition to his grab-and-interrogate moves of the past. He can now floor enemies with a well-placed knee, toss them over ledges or balconies, snap their necks while hanging upside down, even dispatch them with a silent knife thrust. "One of our main focuses with *Chaos Theory* is proximity," says Ferland. "We wanted the player to experience the thrill of operating undetected just inches away from hostiles. Stealth is still extremely important, but now players will realize that getting closer and closer to the enemy in a dangerous situation—while fully in control—is a very rewarding feeling."

The knife (which will serve as a tool as well as a weapon) isn't the only addition to Sam's arsenal, either. He'll have access to a variety of new attachments for the modular SC-20K assault rifle that can be switched out as the situation demands in order to increase firing accuracy, shot power, and so on. He'll also be able to use new thermoptic camouflage to render himself all but invisible, seek out hidden hostiles with a heartbeat detector, and protect himself from noxious fumes with a gas mask.

SAM CAN SNAP ENEMIES' NECKS WHILE HANGING UPSIDE DOWN.

But even a well-equipped superspy like Sam Fisher can use a little help from his friends every now and then, so the game includes an all-new co-op mode in which players team up in person or online to help advance the main story of the game. Thus, many of the new tactics are cooperative in nature: You might be boosting your teammate up to a

NEW TOYS

Chaos Theory includes a variety of new weapons and gadgets, both online and off. Among them:

LAND WARRIOR RIFLE Based on the XM8 prototype and weighing in under six pounds, this customizable weapon is currently being tested by the U.S. Army as part of the Land Warrior program, which aims to make soldiers more self-sufficient.

SC-20K MODULAR ASSAULT WEAPON SYSTEM This compact rifle, based on the real-world F2000, features a muzzle suppressor and an all-purpose launcher among its array of swappable modules.

THERMOPTIC CAMOUFLAGE This technology, currently in very early prototype, will one day render the wearer nearly invisible by displaying on its surface live video of objects located behind the wearer.

HEARTBEAT DETECTOR This staple of the *Rainbow Six* series is based on the (largely discredited) technology that powers the DKL Lifeguard, a product that claims to detect the presence of humans by sensing "a small, irregular electric field generated by a human heart."

CAUTION
EXHAUST
VENT

CHAOS THEORY'S PLOT (IN 75 WORDS OR LESS)

In 2008, weapons engineer Bruce Morgenholt is kidnapped. Sam Fisher is sent to rescue him, and he discovers that the kidnapping was organized by Morgenholt's former partner, Abrahim Zherkezhi. Later, the United States and Japan are attacked with technology known only to Morgenholt and Zherkezhi, prompting the United States to step up patrols in the Korea Strait. North Korea responds with force, and Sam is sent in to calm things down. That's where you come in.

pipe that would be otherwise out of reach, for example, or reaching down to pull him up a wall he wouldn't be able to scale on his own. This is, Ferland tells us, "a new kind of collaborative gameplay that requires and rewards trust and cooperation between two players. We devised new moves, environments that need two players, and special gadgets that foster collaboration."

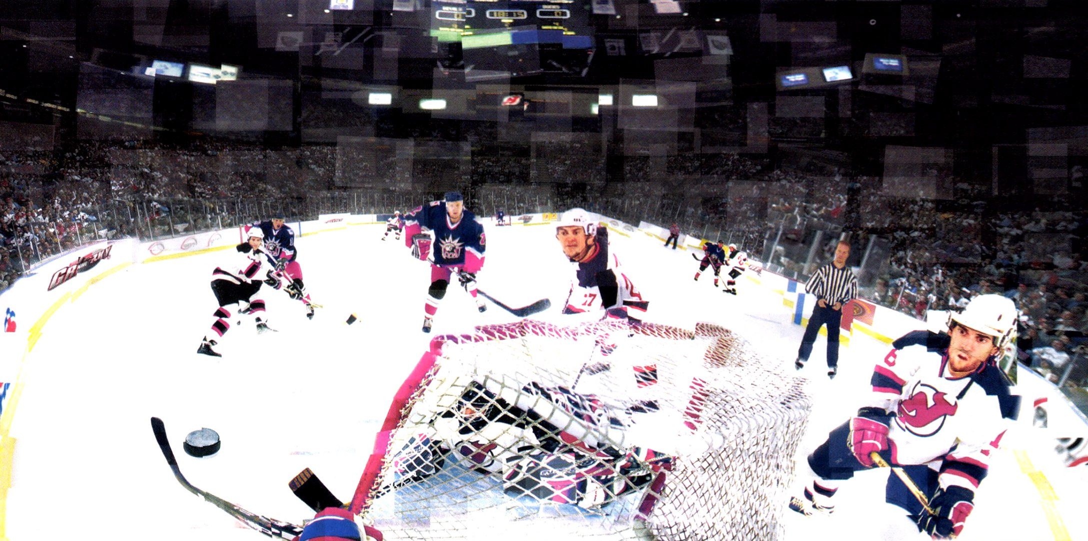
Meanwhile, while reexamining the franchise with an eye toward furthering cooperation, the developers realized that the previous games were fairly linear in nature throughout the single-player mode, so they decided to do something to change that. "We wanted to remove the frustration of getting a 'game over' for missing a noncritical objective," says Ferland. "A nonlinear structure forgives the player for such failures. Another change is allowing players to decide which objective to accomplish first; it's more fun, and it delivers more replay value. It's not just about creating multiple paths through a level, but really enabling players to use their preferred style."

This idea of a personal style extends to competitive online play, too. Anyone who goes online will be able to use an array of new weapons, gadgets, and moves. Want an example? "Mercs can now knock a spy to the ground," says Ferland, "place a foot on his neck, and verbally taunt him before letting him pass out...or moving in for the kill." And leveling the playing field between spies and mercs is just the beginning; both sides will have a vastly expanded hand-to-hand arsenal, many of the cooperative gadgets and moves from the co-op mode...and a whole repertoire of new ways to taunt opponents.

It's never a small thing to rebuild a successful franchise from the ground up; when it works, it can make the developers look like geniuses...and when it doesn't, it can sour the entire franchise. In the case of *Chaos Theory*, it looks like Ubisoft is approaching the renovation from the right direction, keeping the successful bits and sanding down the rough spots. We won't know how it turns out until March—but for now, it sounds like a pretty interesting plan. «

CHAOS THEORY: THE SIX-POINT SUMMARY

1. Sam is meaner.
2. Multiplayer is bigger.
3. Mercs are stronger.
4. Levels are more nonlinear.
5. Gadgets are cooler.
6. Story is weirder.



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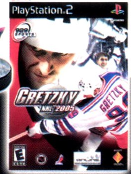

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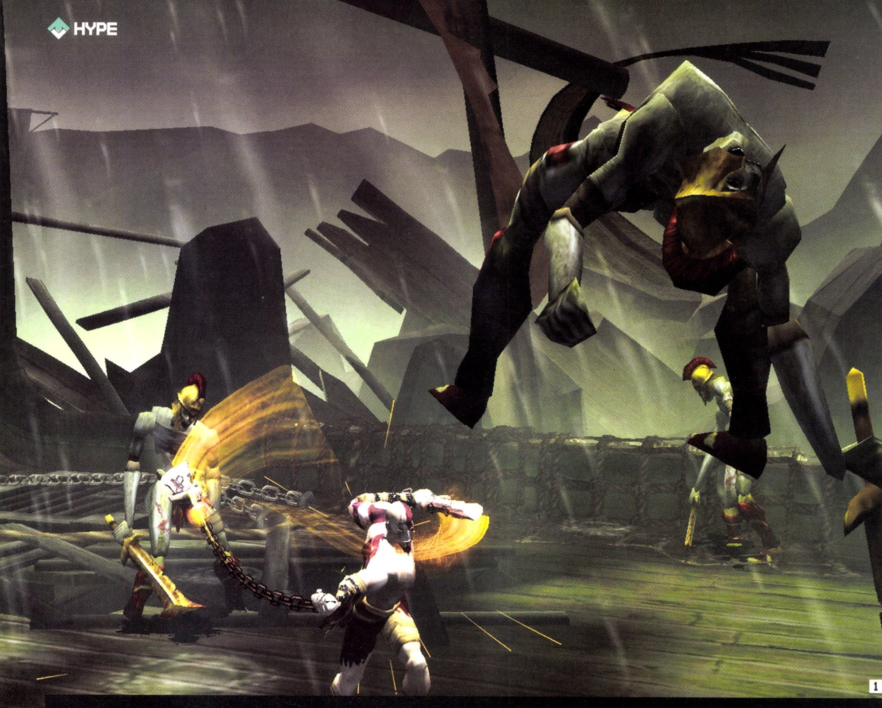

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GOD OF WAR

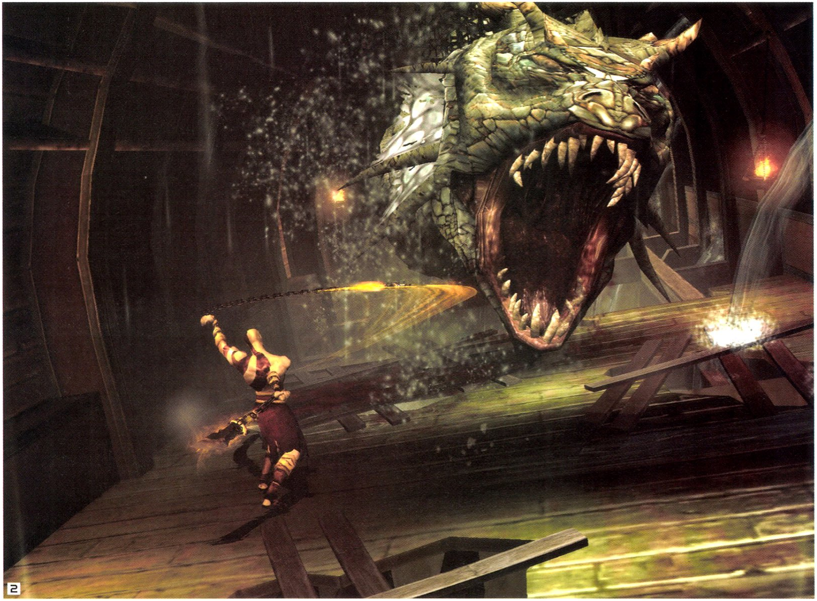
THIS IS ONE WAR THAT WON'T REQUIRE A DRAFT

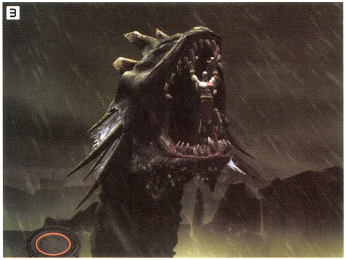
Pub. Sony CEA **Dev.** Sony CEA **Release** March

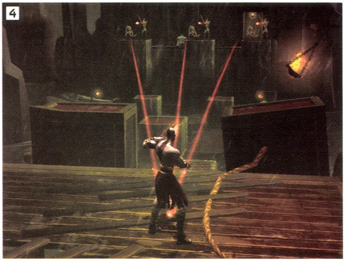
In our first extended time with *God of War* since E3, we got a walk-through of the first level. David Jaffe, the game's producer, gave us the setup. "The opening [level] of the game isn't really tied into the story so much; it's more of an *Indiana Jones* form," he tells us. "It's really designed to put the player right in the action. The first mission [takes place] before the actual story happens."

In this first mission, which happens before the cut-scene showing Kratos' suicide, you'll be taking on the Hydra, a mythological multi-headed monster. Jaffe envisioned *God of War*'s Hydra as almost a supernatural force wreaking havoc on any ship that comes near it. Its habitat is kind of like the Bermuda Triangle, and wrecked ships are strewn across the landscape. Since you won't get to see the game for yourself till March, we thought we'd show you the first level now. Enjoy....

1 Kratos' attacks are free-form and can be strung together in a variety of combinations, many of which are taught in this introductory level. Here, he throws one soldier up in the air while simultaneously lashing at another behind him. How you kill your enemies matters—the right maneuvers will allow you to extract magic and experience from them.







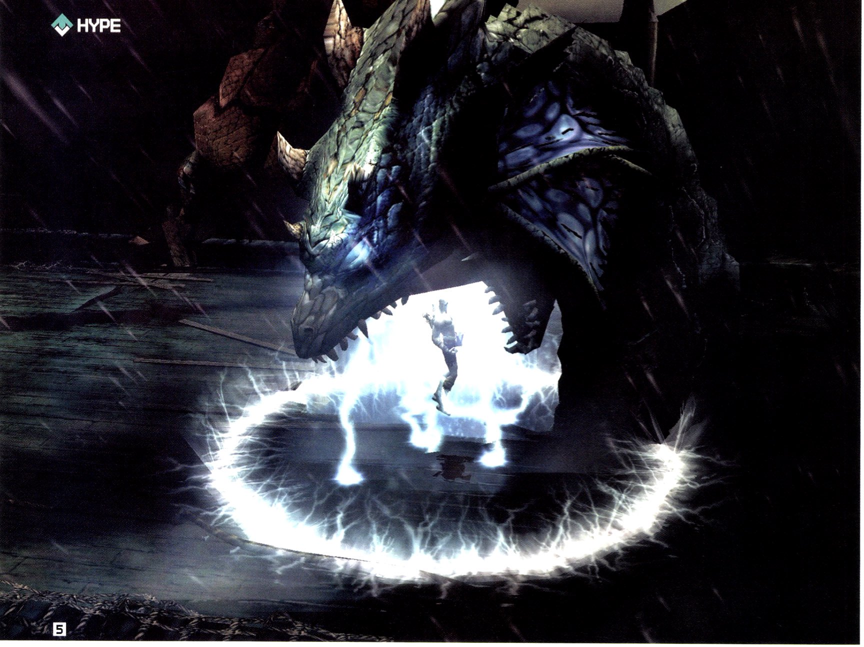
LEGENDARY BITCH

The Hydra was the offspring of Styx (the goddess of the river of death) and Pallas (one of the Titans). Her number of heads varies, ranging from five to 100, but nine is generally considered standard. When Heracles killed her, he had to use a torch to cauterize each neck after slicing off the head to prevent a new one from growing in its place.

2 A lot of the combat training on the first level takes place against the many heads of the Hydra. Here, Kratos uses the blades of chaos to battle against the first head. Once the head is stunned, the player will have to complete a button-pushing sequence to kill it. Since the button sequences are randomly generated each time through, reflexes need to be sharp.

3 Here, as Kratos faces the Hydra's second head, he can allow himself to be caught in its mouth. If the player can successfully complete a minigame, in this case by pressing the Circle button in a *Track and Field*–style speed mash, he can then deliver a critical blow to the Hydra's head. If he fails, then it's bye-bye for Kratos.

4 While the game is definitely combat driven, there are also some mental challenges as well. Here, Kratos faces archers who are attacking him from the top of a ledge that's out of his reach. Somehow he must get a box over to the wall so he can jump up and kill them—the only problem is that the flaming arrows they shoot keep setting the box on fire....



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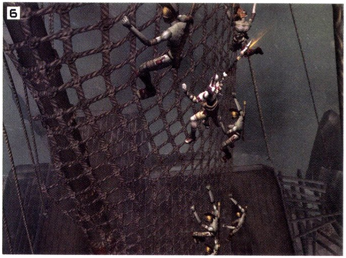

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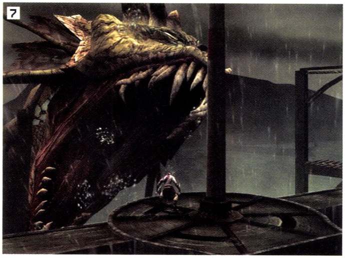

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5 Kratos uses Poseidon's rage on another head. There are four to five magic attacks available in the game, and all can be upgraded. While some upgrades will simply make the attack more powerful, others will open up new options. For example, a powered-up Medusa's head can be used like a stun bomb on a roomful of enemies or targeted to destroy an individual.

6 We've seen Kratos pull himself up cliffs and swing on ropes strung across bottomless caverns; here, he's scaling the rigging of the ship. There's a lot of climbing and maneuvering, but that doesn't stop Kratos from being able to attack. Even when you're on the ropes, you're able to swing blades at enemies or grab them, bash in their heads, and throw them down.

7 This giant daddy Hydra head is the final boss in this level, and he's not exactly in the best of moods—when he opens his mouth to roar, the blast of breath and noise makes the mast (and Kratos) sway unsteadily. You'll have to go a few rounds before you defeat him, and it's going to take more than just your blades. Hint: The mast comes into play.

BACKGROUND

"The idea is that you'll start seeing these various characters…that clearly know of this guy, and [they're] referring to him as the Ghost of Sparta. His reputation is basically preceding him in that people know this white-skinned guy has traveled to the ancient world, and they're very afraid of him and they'll say things to him throughout the game. All you know in the beginning of the game is that he's very feared and that he's got some kind of awful reputation. That's something you'll see in the first level and as the game progresses." —David Jaffe

GOD'S CREATOR

IN THE BEGINNING, THERE WAS DAVID JAFFE

In a season this laden with blockbuster sequels, it's unusual—and refreshing—to see a new game that's unattached to a franchise. We sat down with *God of War* Producer David Jaffe to talk about Greek mythology, the gamble of starting from scratch, and Vegas lounge legend Tom Jones.

OPM Why a Greek mythology game now? How do you go from *Twisted Metal* to this? Were you always interested in this subject matter?

DAVID JAFFE After *Twisted Metal: Black*, my boss was like: "What do you want to make next?" I've always loved Greek mythology and I've always loved the action-adventure genre. Why not roll it all into one game! Sony is great about letting us follow our passions. With SCEA games, it's clear the developers really love what they are doing. I think that is why you see such unique and polished titles from Sony first party.

OPM What did you learn from previous endeavors (the *Twisted Metal* franchise) that helped you out on the development of *God of War*?

DJ The main thing I learned from working on the *Twisted Metal* franchise was [to] iterate, iterate, iterate. Making a game is like editing a movie. You have to try all kinds of different configurations, move things around, cut things out, until you end up with the game you feel in your gut. So coming into *God of War*, I told myself that being a good game director is not about being liked or popular. It's about protecting the player's experience, above all else. If something is not fun, you have to fix it. No matter what! The good news is, lots of the team bought into this same philosophy.

OPM Obviously, you drew a lot of content inspiration from sources like *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. Did you have any main sources of inspiration for gameplay elements?

DJ Some of the gameplay inspirations are obvious: *Devil May Cry*, *Ico*, *Onimusha*. However, I also drew inspiration from more obscure games from the 16-bit era, like *Flashback* and *Out of This World*. Those games really felt like stories that you got to star in! I am disappointed in most action-adventure games today. You read the back of the box and they promise this fantastic adventure. But in reality, in most games, all you do is run from room to room hitting things. Now the combat in some of these games may be fantastic, but it's really about the mechanics and less about the adventure. So with *God of War*, I wanted the game to feel like an epic adventure. To that end, I pushed for lots of level variety so that players felt like they were always seeing and doing something new. We also worked hard to tie some of the character development and storytelling into the gameplay itself. I think these are the elements that make games feel like experiences.

OPM What does *God of War* bring that's new to the action-adventure genre?

DJ This kind of question always irks me, because it assumes that games are products that need a list of "never before seen" features to get someone interested. But I don't agree with that. We got raves coming out of E3 this year, but NO ONE thought we were innovative. And, for this game, I'm very cool with that. Because EVERYONE thought we were damn fun. And that is really the point. So if you are looking for innovation, go play *Katamari Damacy*. If you want to have a savage, brutal adventure, give *God of War* a try.

OPM Were there any mythological creatures you wanted to include in the game that you weren't able to?

DJ We really tried to do the greatest hits of Greek mythology in terms of gods and monsters. While we may have missed a few here or there, we got all of the best-known mythical creatures into the game. There is one creature that we all really wanted but just did not have time to put in. We'll get her in the next one—if we are so lucky to make a part two.

OPM From what we've seen of the game, Kratos comes across as a definite antihero. Was that an intentional choice?

DJ The only intent was to create a character that would allow players to unleash their dark side. I wanted Kratos to represent the raw, savage, animalistic side that we all have. But hero and antihero were not things I worried about. Kratos was designed with the goal of letting players experience—and revel in—a single emotion: rage.

OPM If you had to compare *God of War* to another videogame that's come out this cycle, which would you say it most resembles?

DJ There is not one game to compare it to. We have the action of *Devil May Cry*, the puzzles of *Ico*, the in-game storytelling of *Prince of Persia*. Many of the individual elements are clearly inspired by other games, but we are mixing those elements in a unique way. It all adds up to making *God of War* feel [more] like an epic adventure and less like a game.

> "KRATOS WAS DESIGNED TO LET THE PLAYER REVEL IN RAGE."

OPM Will we be able to unlock any cool *Twisted Metal* vehicles for Kratos to tool around in?

DJ Nah, it's a good idea, but...wait a second, I can't lie. It's not a good idea. So the answer is no. Honestly, I really wanted *God of War* to have no connection with *Twisted Metal*. I just needed to know if I could make other kinds of games. I mean, I understand car combat down to its core. But I've never done a game like *God of War*. And I really need to know if I'm a one-trick pony. So I tossed away the *Twisted Metal* crutches and was pretty adamant about there being no secrets or goodies related to the *Twisted* series. There was an alternate Sweet Tooth costume for Kratos, but I asked the artists to take it out. This is an expensive game. I imagine my career will live or die by it. Scary as that is, I wanna know it succeeded on its own merits.

OPM What's your favorite PS2 game to come out in the past year?

DJ *Onimusha 3*, although I thought the story was pretty goofy. Runner-up: *The Suffering* from Midway.

OPM We hear you're a Tom Jones fan. Ever consider making a game about a Vegas lounge act?

DJ Dude, Tom Jones is AMAZING! The guy is like 60 and he's got these hot 20-year-old chicks tossing panties on the stage! Go, Tom! Maybe I'll put him in *God of War II* as Zeus. That would be sweet. «

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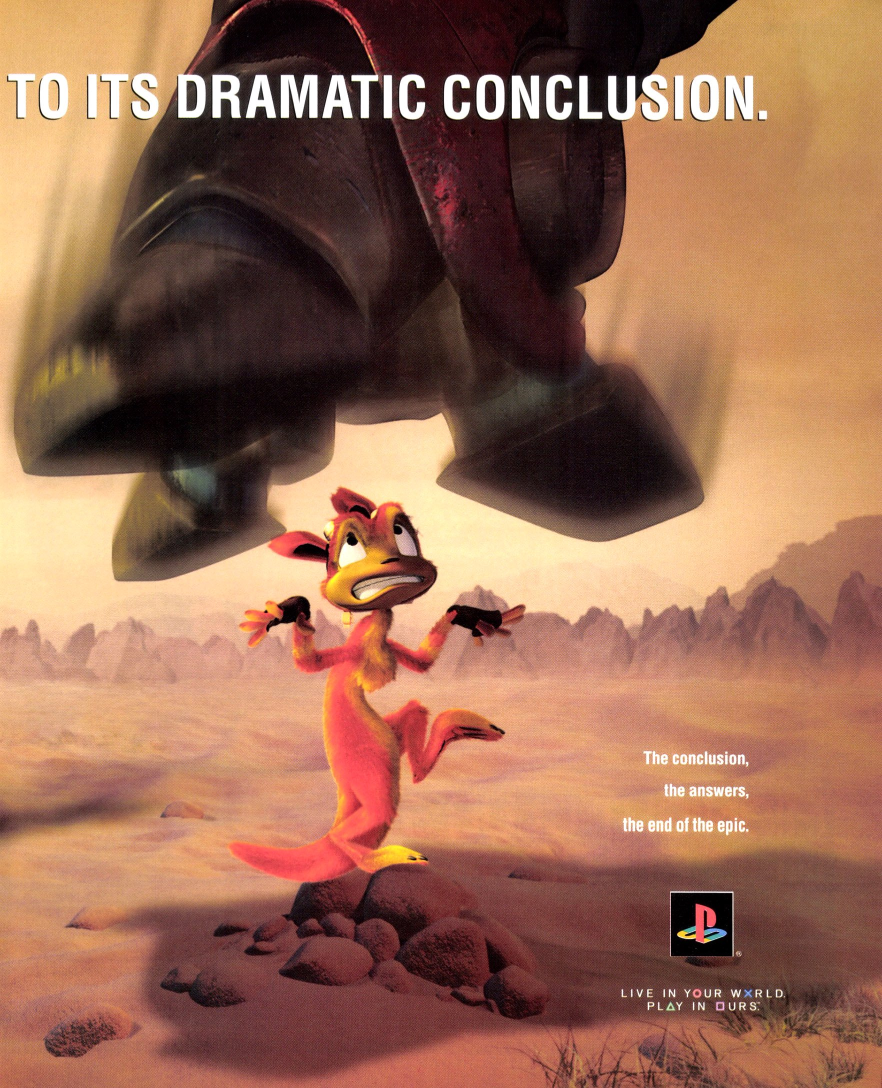
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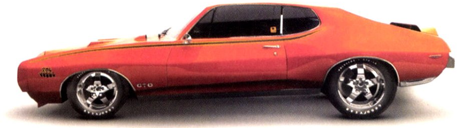
MIDNIGHT CLUB 3 DUB EDITION

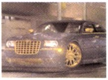
WHERE BEAUTY AND SPEED COME TOGETHER

Pub. Rockstar **Dev.** Rockstar San Diego **Release** Q1 2005

You've seen them. It might have been on the street, in a parking lot, or even on television. After all, it's kind of hard to miss the blinding sheen of spinning rims or the often-outrageous paint jobs of tricked-out cars.

Pick up any car magazine and you'll see countless ads for customized rims and articles showing everything from pimped-out buses to custom choppers. These kinds of modifications are the fastest-growing segment of the automotive industry, so you can understand why *Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition* focuses on this aspect of car culture and why Rockstar hooked up with *DUB*, one of the leading tuner-culture magazines. "We've been paying attention to *DUB* ever since they began four years ago. It became clear that they had a lock on where the customization scene was going, and we knew customization was going to be a huge part of *Midnight Club 3*," says Jay Panek, producer of *Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition*. "We approached them not long after *Midnight Club II* released and found out they were huge gamers. *DUB* told us they had been approached by other game companies but had turned them all down because no one was willing to be true to the culture the magazine represents. If they were going to be associated with a game, they wanted it done right and they wanted to be closely involved with development. This was music to our ears."





PIMP YOUR RIDE

PUT WEST COAST CUSTOMS OUT OF BUSINESS

Obviously, customization plays a huge role in *Midnight Club 3*, but we were honestly shocked to see just how much you can do. Even at the very start of the game, you'll get enough cash to purchase a relatively low-tier car and customize it with a few cool items. Our choice? A '64 Impala, and there was still enough money left over to buy a custom bumper, a new paint job, and a gold grille to make it look nice. After a few more races, we had money to buy side exhaust and nitro. (Just to give you an idea of how far the customization goes, you can even change the color of the fire spewing from your exhaust.)

As you progress through the game, you'll be able to earn money and buy more cars and do some sweet modifications to them. One of our favorites was a color wheel you can unlock that lets you lay down two different layers of paint to give your car an even more unique look. The Toyota Supra we purchased later on looked great with its blue base paint, green coat, sweet rims, and flame graphics on the sides. There are so many options to choose from that you could potentially spend just as much time in the garage as you do in the actual game.

DUB helped out Rockstar by giving the development team suggestions on different aspects of the game. "[*DUB* has helped us in] reality-checking the customization element of the game and opening doors for us in the auto and aftermarket industries," Panek adds. "[They helped us make] sure the vibe of the game was right. Early on there was a lot of real-world detail that we needed clarity on—for example, what would be the most insane but credible visual customizations that could be done to a vehicle like a '69 Charger? They also provided a lot of forward thinking in terms of vehicle selection. The clearest example of this is the Chrysler 300C—these days this is one of the hottest cars in the U.S., something *DUB* predicted a long time ago."

You don't have to worry about the *DUB* label being nothing more than a marketing ploy to immediately attract a certain type of audience. "We don't work like that," says Panek. "We don't try to appeal to a single specific group. Our goal is to make a game that we think is cool and fun to play. At the end of the day, it is always about the racing—making sure it's fast, competitive, and addictive. Our goal from the beginning was to focus on where we wanted to go with the gameplay. At the same time we definitely wanted a game that represented the cutting edge of street racing and customization—that's what led us to work with *DUB*."

"WE'VE MOVED BEYOND THE TUNER SCENE."

But in a market with so many different racing games, some of which also focus on the car-modding culture, like the *Need for Speed Underground* games, *Midnight Club 3* needs something to stand out from the pack. The sheer number of customization options will undoubtedly help, but the gameplay needs to be up to par as well. "The most crucial difference between *Midnight Club 3* and the glut of other racing games is the core open-city gameplay. Other games are selling the concept of open-city racing, but when you play them, what do you get? Blocked-off roads with rows of flashing arrows telling you where you have to drive and invisible bounds to keep you away from the areas that you wish you could drive on," Panek says. "We've moved way beyond the tuner scene that many of our competitors are solely focused on. In addition to tuners, *Midnight Club 3* includes every kind of vehicle class that you want to race. Muscle cars, trucks, high-end sports cars, SUVs, luxury rides, and even street bikes and choppers—and all are licensed."

With all the licensed cars and parts, it's obvious that Rockstar is trying to make the game as authentic as possible, but don't expect a realistic racing sim à la *Gran Turismo 4*. And it's not a full-on arcade-type racing game like *Burnout 3* either. *Midnight Club 3* strikes a balance between the two subgenres. The cars handle and behave much as they would in real life, but the racing is so fast paced—especially when you get nitro—that it has an arcade feel to it. "We've played all of the racing games, [and] we keep coming back to the same vision for *Midnight Club 3*; we wanted to create the fastest, most free-form racing game possible without losing sight of the precision control and detailed real-world customization," Panek says. "Nailing that balance isn't easy, but I feel we've pulled it off."

KEEP ROLLIN'

DO YOU KNOW WHERE YOUR PINK SLIP IS?

Racing in *Midnight Club 3* is divided among three cities—San Diego, Atlanta, and Detroit—each of which has a connection to the automotive world, landmarks, and a variety of other unique traits. When you drop into one of these cities for the first time, you have the option to cruise around and get an idea of what the city is like, or you can use the time to find shortcuts that could be useful during a race. When you want to race someone, you simply look at your map and find where an opponent is, drive over, and signal that you want to race.

During a race, you'll notice a few things. First, the cars feel like they have some weight to them, so a huge vehicle like an H2 is relatively sluggish in comparison to something like the 300C. Ultimately, you end up developing a driving strategy of either brute force or finesse, depending on your ride. However, regardless of the car you're driving, you can still make use of the slipstream turbo that essentially gives you a free turbo boost if you manage to draft behind an opponent and fill up the turbo meter. Nitro is also very valuable, particularly when heading toward a platform that'll make you go airborne. But be careful. *Midnight Club 3* delivers a serious sense of speed, and you can easily careen into a building or traffic if you're not careful. «

TAKE IT ONLINE

Rockstar's keeping quiet on most of *Midnight Club 3's* online features, but you can expect the online experience to be significantly improved over that of its predecessor. "Our plan for the online component of *Midnight Club 3* is to take everything that we couldn't or didn't know how to do in *Midnight Club II* and pack it into the game," Jay Panek, producer for *Midnight Club 3*, explains. "There will be eight-player online play, the highest number of competitors for online play in any racing game now or in the near future. The cities will be completely open online, no restrictions. All of the new types of arcade races will be available online. Host migration is an important new feature in *Midnight Club 3*. In *Midnight Club II*, there were times when the host would quit during a race. This would disconnect everyone from the game, and they would have to go back to the lobby and find each other again. In *Midnight Club 3*, when the host quits, a new host will be automatically selected and nobody will be disconnected from the current session. We've also added asynchronous joins, which allow players to get into existing sessions. As a result, there will always be a virtual city online where people can meet up with friends and explore the open city, race, cruise, or just hang out and check out each other's rides. There will be all sorts of rankings and stats online. Once you get really good at *Midnight Club 3*, you are going to want to find people that will be a challenge to beat, so we'll make sure you have the info to do that."

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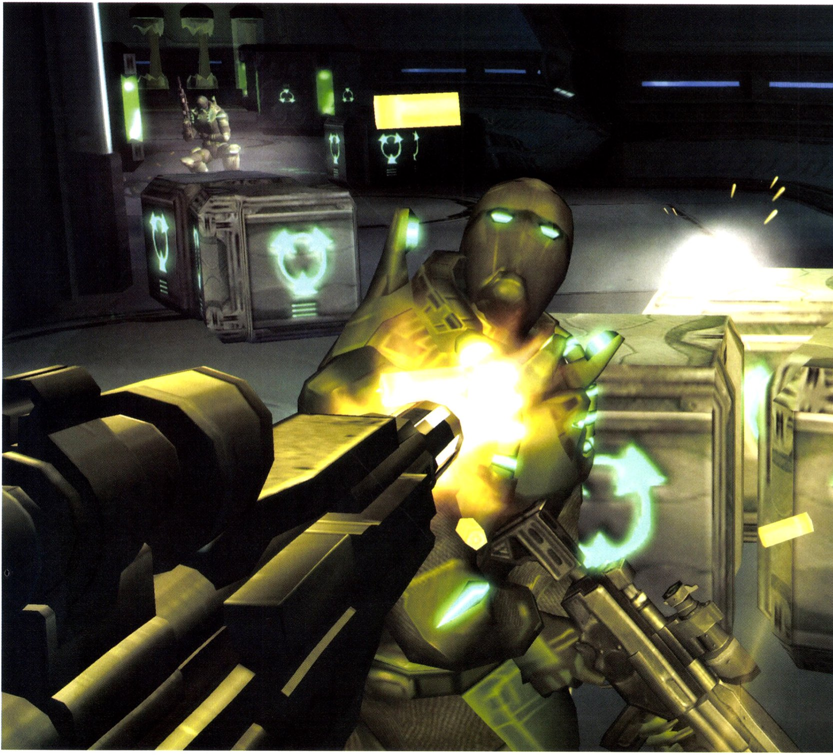


AREA 51

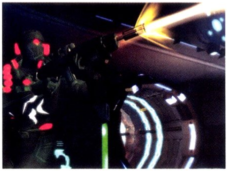
YOU WILL WANT TO BELIEVE

Pub. Midway **Dev.** Midway Studios Austin **Release** Q1 2005

With the *Killzone* wave arriving and washing away, FPS fans need something new to load up. Sure, there's the next *TimeSplitters* game and another *Medal of Honor*, but there's nothing truly substantive and immediate to latch onto.

Except *Area 51*.

Similar to *Half-Life* (you know your game is off to a good start when it resembles the best first-person shooter ever), *Area 51* starts off as just another day on the job. Hazmat Delta was sent in earlier to decontaminate Area 51, but contact with the team has been lost. Hence, you step in as Ethan Cole, a member of Hazmat Bravo. At this point, *Area 51* feels almost like a squad-based shooter. You have your buddies who frequently crack wise while shooting baddies left and right. You don't control any of them (Cole doesn't rate command), so you have to follow the whims of team leader Ramirez. Thankfully, the team members do a decent job of staying alive, taking cover positions, and blasting away. *Area 51* almost



feels like *Rainbow Six*, but with mutated people instead of terrorists.

Like in any horror movie, though, your team eventually gets picked off. Just as you're getting comfortable fighting alongside your comrades, they get torn apart—literally. And not only are you left all alone, but you've been infected and mutated as a result.

Area 51's arsenal mixes the traditional with the exotic. Like a certain Master Chief, Cole can dual-wield select weapons (particularly gratifying is the tearing power of two shotguns simultaneously blasting away). Besides your normal bullet-ejecting firearms, there're also weird experimental weapons; a particular favorite is the BBO, which shoots weird energy balls that bounce off inorganic matter and attach to organic matter before exploding. You can bounce shots around corners and flush out campers in multiplayer. Additionally, your mutant powers include a more savage melee attack, the ability to see cloaked enemies (there are some crazy infected black-ops soldiers who phase in and out like the Predator), and weird parasites you can shoot out that suck health from your enemies and transfer it back to you. However, when you become a mutant, you use up mutagen, which gets regenerated by taking down other infected enemies. This adds a tactical element to the game, as you find yourself switching between the normal human mode and the mutant mode for different situations.

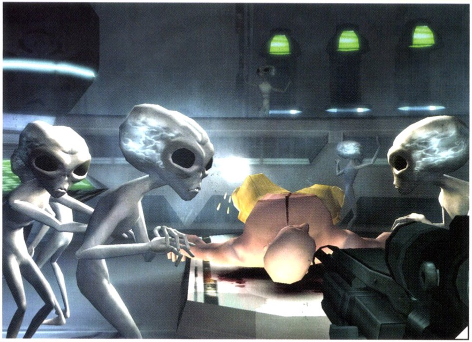
THE ARSENAL MIXES THE TRADITIONAL WITH THE EXOTIC.

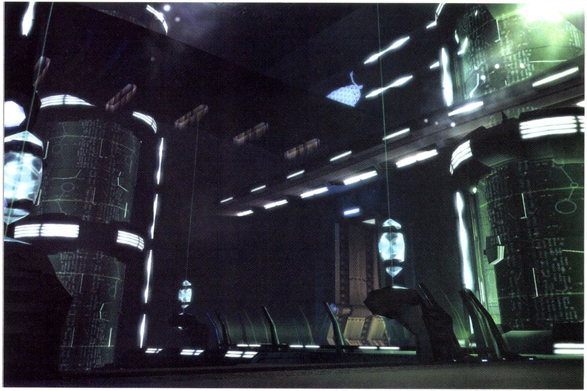
All this action and mutantery is rendered gorgeously. At times, it feels as though the game isn't even made for the PS2, as Midway Studios

ALIENZ

LOOK BUT DON'T TOUCH—YET

Those bastard grays are all over the place. Except most of the time, you won't be fighting them. They're a bit on the wimpy side, preferring to use technology or other beings to fight you. Whenever you see a gray, you are usually either unarmed or behind bulletproof glass and can only watch them do their insidious work. Note that we said "most of the time." Creative Director Daryl Allison explains, "Basically, we just want to tease you with the grays, over and over, until you reach the moment when you can finally take one down."





MULTIPLAYER

DYNAMIC MAPS

The most interesting piece of MP-related news is the new "expanding maps" technology. Basically, maps will be made on the large side to accommodate a healthy number of players (say, up to 16). These maps have several doors and pathways. So what happens when there're only three players? Doors are locked and pathways are blocked. Yet if four players suddenly join the game to up the count to seven, doors start opening and more of the map is available. If the remaining nine players log in, everything opens up. But if 10 of those 16 players leave, doors start closing again. Basically, the map dynamically adjusts its size based on player count. Nothing else on the PS2 is really trying to use this technology; the closest is *Battlefield 2* for the PC, which has a similar dynamic-map sizing system.

Austin is putting all sorts of graphical hoo-ha into the game. Terminology like "projected texture," "vertex lighting," and "diffuse map" help push the game to a near-Xbox level of detail. A small but neat example is how you can shoot cloth (like, say, a flag or a curtain) and actually see right through the bullet hole. In fact, the programming team noticed that the PS2 is actually better at oversaturating colors than the other consoles, which helps give the game's weirder parts that foreign, unearthly vibe.

Storywise, *Area 51* sounds like a descent into alien hell. As the game shifts from a more straightforward near-future shooter into alien territory (literally, as a clean research facility gives way to hybrid alien architecture), so too does the story get weirder. Pretty much any wacko conspiracy theory is reflected here, whether it's the Roswell crash, the alien autopsy, or the American space program. While the player experiences it in the present, the story is told in past tense. Besides cut-scenes and in-game radio chatter, Midway Studios Austin decided to add one more storytelling device: vocal load times. "We wanted to give the players something more entertaining than just another load screen," comments Creative Director Jim Stiefelmaier. Hence, in between chapters, David Duchovny lends his voice talent to another piece of backstory, giving the context for the upcoming level. Even radio chatter gets bizarre, as Marilyn Manson's role as your alien "friend" Edgar calls for Manson to have his voice oversampled and delivered through corpses. Producer Zach Wood comments, "While you get your normal orders through the radio from your commander, we wanted to do something really bizarre and far out for the late game and came up with Edgar animating dead people."

The fact that *Area 51* is more than just a light-gun game is surprising enough, but the solid craft being put into it, whether it's aesthetics, mood, sound, A.I., or design, makes it a significant title. There were rumors at one point of Sony trying to make *Area 51* a PS2 exclusive. It's that good, and it might be the first breakout shooter of 2005. «

MIDWAY

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TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Language
Partial Nudity
Suggestive Themes
Violence

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PlayStation 2

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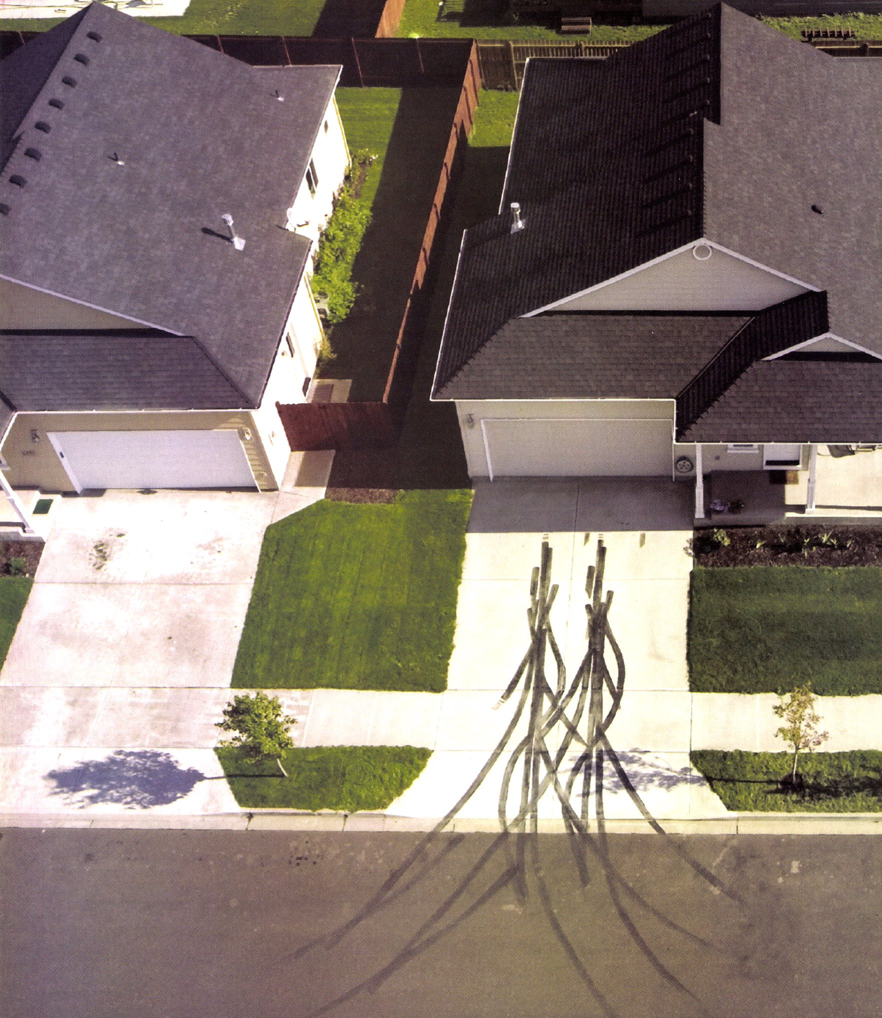

EVERYONE
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CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

PlayStation 2

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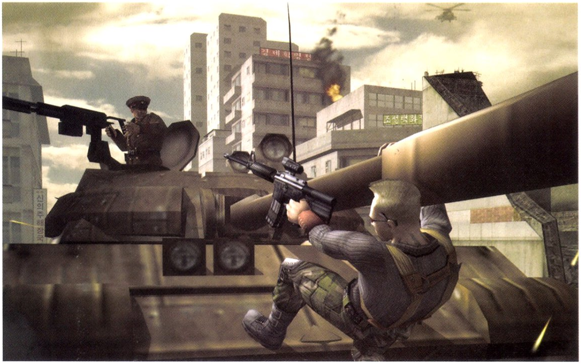
MERCENARIES

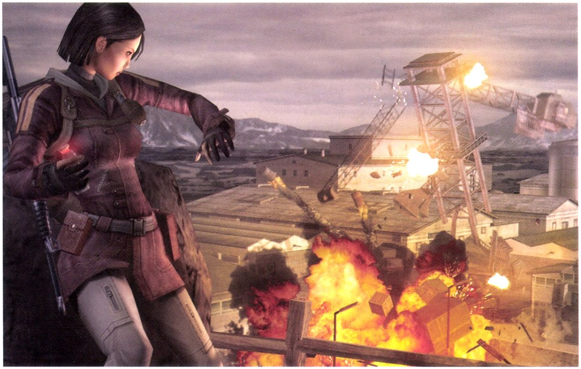
IF YOU CAN SEE IT, YOU CAN USE IT, STEAL IT, DRIVE IT, FLY IT, OR BLOW IT UP

Pub. LucasArts **Dev.** Pandemic Studios **Release** January

Set for release in January, *Mercenaries* could prove to be very significant for a number of reasons: It will be one of the first truly spectacular and epic games of 2005; it's being developed by Pandemic, the white-hot team that previously wowed us with *Star Wars Battlefront*; and it's a brand-new franchise from a publisher not known for busting out the new IP very often. Having dabbled in a few new ideas with only moderate success these past few years, it seemed that LucasArts was going to keep its head down and just bang out the occasional *Star Wars* game under new boss Jim Ward. *Mercenaries* is a bold move in a new direction for the company, and it is something that certainly would have been lost in the commotion of this holiday season had it launched in November.

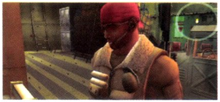
Set in the near future, the game tackles everyone's least favorite axis of evil, North Korea, and the consequences of a military coup that occurs on the eve of the reunification of North and South Korea. A ruthless general has seized control, and the international community must move quickly to avert a growing nuclear threat. Diplomatic efforts, predictably, fall apart



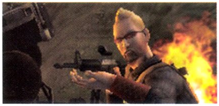


THE TEAM

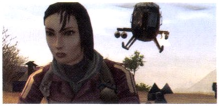
A MERC FOR EVERY OCCASION



THE AMERICAN
Chris Jacobs is an ex-Delta Force operative who speaks Korean, so he can communicate with the locals. For the player, he is notable for his strength and endurance, which means he essentially has more hit points than the other guys.



THE SWEDE
Matthias Nilsson is an ex-Swedish Coastal Ranger who speaks Russian, making him particularly useful when dealing with the Mafia presence in the region. The team at Pandemic describes Nilsson as the "hardcore gamer's choice" because of his speed and agility.



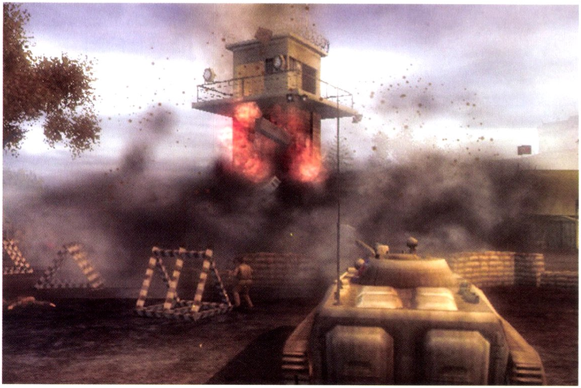
THE BRIT
Jennifer Mui is a British-trained ex-MI6 agent who speaks Chinese. Her skills make her the ideal choice for ingratiating the player with the Chinese military presence in the region (they'd like North Korea for themselves), but she's also the stealthy choice. Mui can sneak up on guards more effectively than the two men can.

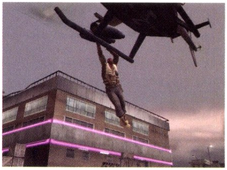
quickly and a military solution is sought. A $100 million bounty is put on the general's head, and other top targets are subsequently identified on a most-wanted list in the form of a deck of cards. Playing as one of three operatives for a private military corporation called Executive Operations, your job is to head to the DMZ, work your way through the region, and take out the bad guys.

"When we started preproduction, the U.S. armed forces were hunting through the caves of Pakistan for Osama bin Laden," explains Matthew Paul, *Mercenaries*' producer at Pandemic Studios. "There had been massive destruction in the war zone, and yet the coalition forces hadn't found the elusive figurehead. At the time, we thought, 'Hey, wouldn't it be interesting if the fantasy was that you were hunting down these high-value targets that had escaped military forces from different countries?' That fantasy thrilled us all—get to play with the toys of the real military while hunting down a deck of 52 villains. Just from reading the news every day and watching TV, we saw our gameplay unfold before our very eyes."

Mercenaries is about much more than just a lone operative hunting down a sequence of evildoers, though. In a break from the predictable, the game takes run-and-gun third-person gameplay and mixes it with a "digital sandbox" approach that rivals *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* for the degree of freedom it offers players. Every objective in the game can be approached in different ways, whether it's as simple as choosing between sneaking into a location or running in with guns blazing, or making more elaborate choices concerning how you dispose of targets. Do you blow them up with explosives? Or do you launch an air strike

EVERY OBJECTIVE CAN BE APPROACHED IN DIFFERENT WAYS.





JACK IT

Stealing cars isn't exactly new, but helicopters? Time things just right, and you can leap up and grab onto the landing skids before hauling yourself up and punching the pilot in the junk. Once you've thrown him out, the bird is yours to wreak mayhem with.

against them? Do you go in on foot? Or do you jack a jeep, or a tank, or even a helicopter to do the job? The game offers more than 70 different vehicles (both civilian and military) that can be commandeered, as well as more weapons than you could possibly imagine, including pistols and machine guns, recoilless rifles, and SAM launchers and other fixed-emplacement fun.

"Our next big question was, 'So who's this hero you're playing?'" Paul explains. "Upon further research, we came across PMCs—private military corporations. Working for a PMC, in essence being a part of a mercenary group, gave us the hero and the motivation we wanted. This hero could legitimately be able to use all the modern-day weaponry of the different armies, but he had to report only to the PMC. As a mercenary, the hero gets to do whatever he wants. And the mercenary does what he does for one thing—money. We created this dynamic in the game by introducing the four different factions, all of which have different contracts for the hero to pursue. The hero can work with the Allied forces, the South Koreans, the Russian Mafia, or the Chinese, each with its own motivations, some of which are clear only after you play into the game for a while. The mercenary can provide support to one faction, only to turn around and accept a contract from another faction that crosses the first. The mercenary lifestyle became an integral part of the story and the game mechanics."

The game begins with your chosen hero (see sidebar) dropping into the region and heading to the Allied HQ in the DMZ. You are immediately given a taste of the game's mechanics as you drive your Humvee toward a North Korean roadblock. As the bad guys pepper your vehicle with lead, you're treated to the first of many huge explosions in the game. As you return fire, the assorted junk that fills the beautifully rendered environment is thrown around in a truly believable display of clever physics calculations. Anything in the game world that isn't bolted down (and a lot of stuff that is) can be destroyed, moved, toppled over, or blown up. Aim an RPG at a jeep next to a pile of boxes and chuckle as the ensuing fireball

POLITICAL WHO'S WHO

KEEP FRIENDS CLOSE AND ENEMIES CLOSER

There are five main factions in *Mercenaries*. First, there are the Allied forces, which are pretty much a representation of the United Nations and are headed up by the Americans. They're looking to calm things down in the region and stop the North Koreans from selling nukes to terrorists or pointing them at America.

The North Koreans are the bad guys of the story. They staged the coup, and the deck of 52 is comprised of different types of threats. You start the game by chasing after the clubs, who are white-collar business bad guys; you then move on to the hearts, who are scientists and chemical weapons guys; the diamonds are the thugs of the game, while the spades are the elite soldiers and commanders of the North Korean military, with the ace of spades being the big bad general himself.

The South Koreans are the local good guys, but they have a bad relationship with the Chinese, who have a controlling interest in the area due to their funding of military activity and their desire to absorb all of Korea into the Chinese union.

Finally, the Russian Mafia is composed of the guys that everyone hates. All they're interested in is exploiting the situation for cold, hard cash, and because of that, they can be quite useful as a resource for the mercenaries—particularly if you're interested in getting your hands on a certain piece of hardware.

kicks the boxes up into the air before they crash back to the ground.

A recent visit to LucasArts' impressive Big Rock Ranch facility in Marin County, CA, gave us the opportunity to sample some of the more spectacular examples of giant explosions the game presents. As the hero trotted up to a huge gated complex, he used a satellite camera to target the compound's guard towers and called in a carpet-bombing strike. As the jets screeched overhead, a wall of flame hit the ground before pushing forward, destroying everything in its path. Watching the guard towers and surrounding buildings drop was like watching a video of a Vegas casino being demolished. Huge plumes of smoke kicked up as the buildings crumbled and dropped into the ground as though a giant hole was swallowing them up.

The plumes of smoke are actually a big part of what makes *Mercenaries* tick, too. Since the PS2 was first announced, much has been made of its ability to manipulate particles to create gorgeous effects; however, very few games have fully exploited this aspect of the system. *Mercenaries*, we're told, does everything that Kutaragi and his pals in Japan had in mind when they first dreamed up the PS2's Graphics Synthesizer. There's no better example of this than when your mercenary calls for backup in the middle of the DMZ while torrential weather beats down on him. The environment fogs up, the rain streaks down, and after he drops a flare, thick red smoke billows up into the sky for his comrades to home in on. As the chopper flies in to drop whatever piece of glorious hardware is queued up, the wash from its rotors dissipates the red smoke and then kicks up the water that has settled on the ground. The effect is remarkably realistic, and it's just one of many spectacular moments in the game.

From what we've seen so far, *Mercenaries* stands to be one of the first surprise hits of 2005. When we played the game, the team at Pandemic was still balancing the gameplay, but assuming it succeeds in attaining the right mix of driving, shooting, and destruction, LucasArts could have a new franchise on its hands—one that will hopefully last through the end of this hardware generation and into the next one. «

MERCENARIES IN 20 SECONDS

- You're a merc chasing 52 North Korean bad guys while playing other countries against each other.
- It's like *GTA*, only with a military theme and better graphics.
- If you can see it, you can use it, steal it, drive it, fly it, or blow it up.

FIVE QUESTIONS WITH TEAM FUSION

EA BECOMES A MAJOR PSP PLAYER

The biggest third-party videogame publisher in the world plans to support Sony's PSP handheld in a big way. We chatted with EA Team Fusion producer David McCarthy to get the lowdown on what the company has in store.

OPM So why is EA putting such a big push behind the PSP?

DAVID MCCARTHY What we see in the platform is that it can re-create the type of quality that EA is known for. It also [does a better job] of hitting the type of demographic we're looking for than other handhelds. We're finally looking at a market that includes the 18- to 34-year-old group.

OPM Why choose *Need for Speed Underground* and *Tiger Woods* as launch games?

DM [We chose] *Need for Speed Underground Rivals* because *Underground* is a global success story. It's EA's best-selling console game, with 7.5 million units sold for the original *Underground*.

With *Tiger Woods*, there's a natural match with the hardware. We talk about the sweet spot being in that 18 to 34 range, which is also the EA Sports demographic. We think a lot of early adopters are going to be those business types who like to play golf on the road. Also, Tiger Woods is a celebrity, and as an athlete, he has global appeal.

OPM What's the team's approach to game design on a handheld like the PSP?

DM We don't want to make any sacrifices, so our objective from day one was to bring the quality, the amount of special effects, and the complexity of environments that you find in a console product. This hardware is strong enough to deliver that on a handheld for the first time ever, so from a design perspective, we've tried to maintain all of the pillars of these franchises. For example, in *Underground*, you have a lot of shiny road surfaces, light trails, and light flares. In *Tiger*, you've got very detailed particle effects, like sand coming out of the bunker and water splashes. These games were never planned as ports, so from day one, we've always tried to offer a unique experience on the PSP.

OPM Is it easier to work with PSP hardware than it is PS2 hardware?

DM Our developers say that the PSP environment is easier to work in than the earlier PlayStation environment. The architecture of the PSP is a little more accessible than the PlayStation 2's. Again, we're taking some bigger steps with the PSP early on, but I think we're going to be able to tap into the hardware more than we initially thought.

"WE'RE TRYING TO OFFER A UNIQUE EXPERIENCE ON THE PSP."

OPM What would you say to someone who thinks this is the console game, only in portable form?

DM One of our objectives from a design point is for you to say exactly that. We want you to feel that this is the true console experience on PSP, but beyond that, we're going to add value with some unique content that you can't find anywhere else but on the PSP. «

WANT MORE?

Then come back next month when we offer the first look at the six titles EA Games will have available for PSP's U.S. launch in March.

THE WATCHDOG

PANDORA'S PSP

JOHN SCALZI
is our man keeping an eye on things for the benefit of all gamers. You can see more of his thoughts at www.scalzi.com.

Similar to just about every other person who reads this magazine (or writes for it), I have to carry around a small towel to gather all the drool that accumulates whenever I hear the word "PSP" (yes, it's actually an acronym, not a word. Sue me). And if the pricing rumors I hear are true (that it will be sold for between $179 and $199), there is almost no doubt that it's going to have monster sales right out of the box—millions of the portable gaming machines will be out on the streets within months.

And that's going to present an interesting problem.

Consider this: Right now, the most popular handheld system is Nintendo's Game Boy Advance, which centers on kid-friendly gaming and some limited video playback through cartridges (for example, episodes of *SpongeBob SquarePants*). There are a handful of M-rated Game Boy Advance cartridges, but they are few, and the modest screen resolution of the system keeps things on the tamer side of graphic.

But now comes the PSP. It has a screen resolution of 480x272 (basically that of a small television) and the capability for 16 million colors—more than enough for realistic graphics. And unlike Nintendo, Sony does not have a history of shying away from M-rated games. The PSP's mini-CD-like UMD discs can carry 1.8GB of information, and the PSP is easily able to display video; it's a given movies will show up in UMD format, including, one suspects, R-rated features.

What about movies that are—shall we say—harder than R on UMD? It's not likely since Sony controls the UMD production process. But the PSP also includes a slot for a Memory Stick, which can be stuffed with audio and video of the owner's choosing for playback using the PSP's multimedia capabilities. Porn on the PSP will happen, probably within about 15 minutes of some people getting their PSPs home. And then some idiot will watch the stuff on his PSP out there in public. Think it won't happen? I refer you to the following article at SiliconAlley.com from March of 2004: "Rise of DVD players in cars leads to cases of drive-by porn."

But it doesn't even have to be porn: Sit next to the wrong person while you watch an R-rated film or play an M-rated game on your PSP, and suddenly there will be complaints that the PSP is taking videogame violence (and Hollywood sex) into public places where they've never been before—and never should be. Yes, portable DVD players already exist, as well as laptops capable of playing DVDs and violent games—but not in the huge numbers that the relatively cheap PSP will rack up with a young, multimedia-engaged audience.

SOME IDIOT WILL WATCH PORN ON HIS PSP OUT THERE IN PUBLIC.

In short: The PSP is going to create the next great videogame controversy. This is not a prediction: It's a statement of fact ahead of the event. What can you do? Besides being aware that this national conversation is on the way, not much, except this: When you use your PSP in public, remember that you are in public. There will inevitably be some fool who will be arrested for watching porn on his PSP in a public place. Try really hard to make sure it's not you. «

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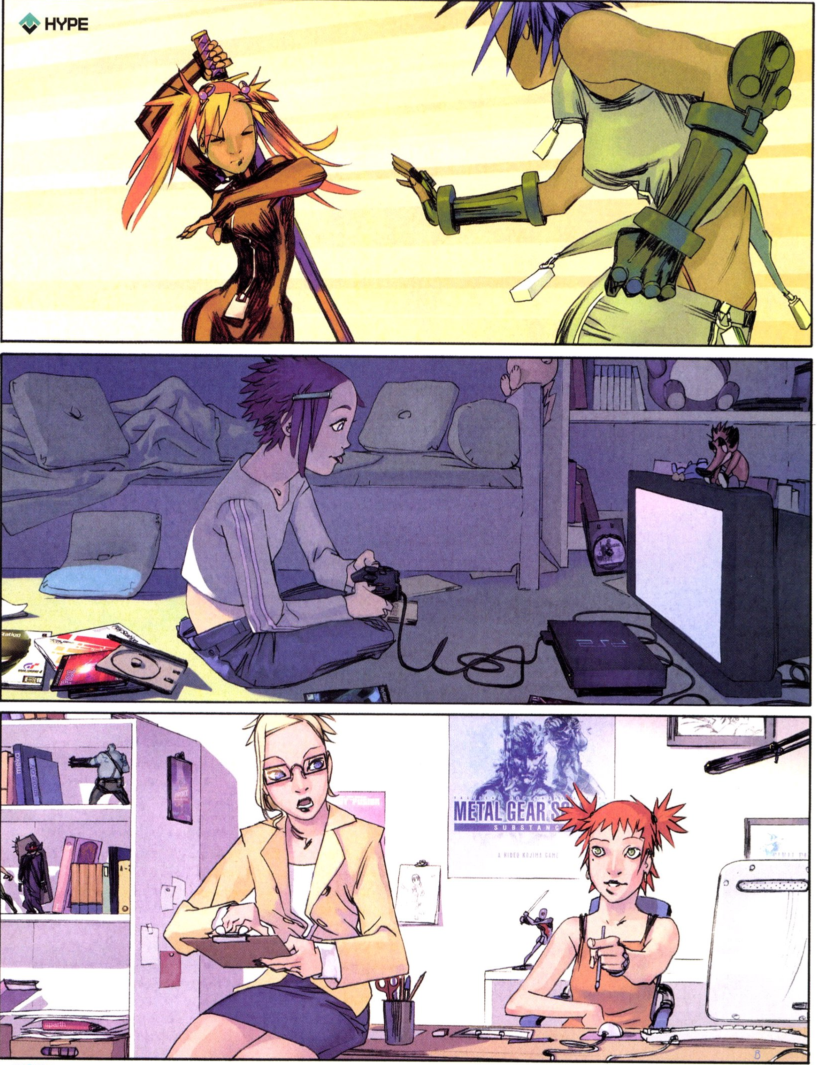
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Illustrattion by bengal

The first identifiable female gaming action hero, Lara Croft has appeared in six games since her debut eight years ago in the original *Tomb Raider.*

GETTING THE GIRL

THE MYTHS, MISCONCEPTIONS, AND MISDEMEANORS OF FEMALES IN GAMES **by Zoe Flower**

It was 1996 when a little development house out of the U.K. finished work on a lush new adventure game featuring a brunette archeologist named Lara Croft. It was a defining moment for me as I watched her strut seductively across my screen and into the sex symbol status that would turn the gaming world on its head. Fast-forward eight years through the evolution of next-gen hardware, multimillion-dollar budgets, and massive acceptance of games in pop culture. Still, Lara Croft continues to personify an ongoing culture clash over gender, sexuality, empowerment, and objectification. It was while standing in my first-ever ladies' room line at E3 2004 as I pondered the Playboy bunnies, the return of Leisure Suit Larry, and the slew of buxom virtual ladies headlining each booth that I questioned whether the industry had evolved at all.

It might seem like a simple puzzle to solve: trying to understand why female representation in videogames—whether it's as characters, developers, or gamers—is important. But it seemed the more questions I asked, the more elusive the answers became. And it wasn't long before my own stereotypes were called into question.

When I requested an interview to discuss Cyberlore's *Playboy: The Mansion*, I never even considered that the senior designer on the *Sims*-style project might be a woman—one pregnant with twins, in fact. As I expected, Brenda Brathwaite has a lot to say about females in today's games. But I can guarantee it's not what you might expect.

"If you're going to animate breasts, animate them properly," admonishes Brathwaite. "The breasts in the original *Dark Alliance* drove me nuts. If my breasts moved like that, I'd go to the doctor...or call an exorcist."

While this industry veteran shows a sense of humor and perspective concerning her work, there are many who won't find the idea of creating a *Playboy* magazine simulator funny. "I suspect that those who feel it's a gender controversy have probably not seen an issue of *Playboy* magazine. They have it stereotyped," suggests Brathwaite. "I find that *Playboy* is a celebration of women and goes out of its way to be respectful. On *Playboy: The Mansion*, we were committed to making a good, tasteful game."

I got a similar response regarding Majesco's *BloodRayne*; Rayne, coincidentally, just appeared in *Playboy*'s "Sexiest Game Characters" spread. And here too, the product manager for the goth queen was herself female.

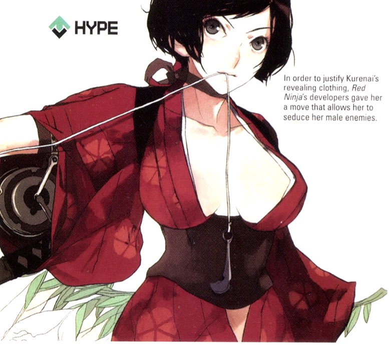
"If you don't have the gameplay to back up the character appeal, T&A will only get you so far," effuses Liz Buckley. "BloodRayne resonates very well with our target audience of males ages 17 to 34, but Rayne has a huge female following as well. I think that's attributable to her strength and attitude—it's definitely empowering to play as her."

> "WE WERE COMMITTED TO MAKING PLAYBOY A TASTEFUL GAME."

So if it's all about personality, why bother with the heaving bosom and leather chaps? It turns out Rayne was an ugly duckling before her transformation to voluptuous vixen. "Initially, Rayne had a militant, dark gothic look. She was a brunette with tight buns in her hair and a very severe body line," explains Buckley. And I even found myself admitting I'd rather play the "extreme makeover" version of the vamp.

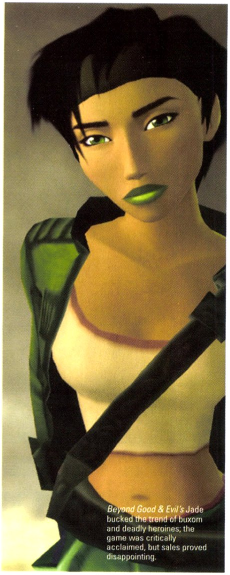
Maybe it's not a crime to sex up the leading ladies, particularly if they retain some character development. But what about Vivendi's upcoming *Red Ninja*, which claims to incorporate sexuality as a gameplay mechanic, allowing main character Kurenai to seduce unsuspecting guards?

"It's a challenging concept to attempt when body language and atmosphere are confined by things like polygon limits," admits Associate Producer Melissa Miller. "Early on, we conducted a focus test specifically with

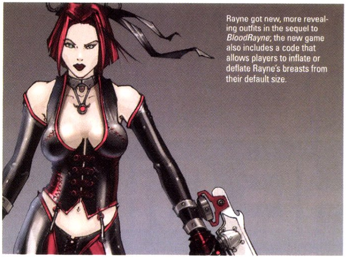


In order to justify Kurenai's revealing clothing, *Red Ninja*'s developers gave her a move that allows her to seduce her male enemies.

Will Nina's low-cut shorts and thigh-high boots allow her to deliver a more powerful blow in *Death by Degrees*? The developer wants you to believe so.



Beyond Good & Evil's Jade bucked the trend of buxom and deadly heroines; the game was critically acclaimed, but sales proved disappointing.



Rayne got new, more revealing outfits in the sequel to *BloodRayne*; the new game also includes a code that allows players to inflate or deflate Rayne's breasts from their default size.

female gamers. They liked the concept of Kurenai but felt she was showing too much skin with the short kimono. Once we justified the need for some sexiness with the seduction mechanic, they bought into Kurenai completely and were really excited about playing her."

Producer Yozo Sakagami of Namco's *Death by Degrees*, featuring *Tekken*'s Nina, expressed a similar design challenge when trying to achieve what his team calls "functional beauty in combat." It turns out that Nina's bikini and catsuit are more than just eye candy. "The outfit designs were based on ease of movement and variation in appearance," states Sakagami. "Depending on whether an attack connects with bare or clothed skin, the resulting damage differs."

"[SEXY] CHARACTER DESIGNS ARE AN EASY WAY OUT."

Right. And are female gamers buying into it? "We've received favorable reactions from women toward Nina in this game. We were surprised because these women saw in Nina the character image we had hoped to create but feared we hadn't attained. Intangible elements such as these can easily be obscured while developing a game."

With such a positive response to stereotypical female protagonists, I began to question whether it was possible to design a strong female character without the requisite augmented body and sexual references.

"These types of character designs are not necessary; it is an easy way out," argues Ubisoft's Tyrone Miller. "*Beyond Good & Evil* shows us that you can convey the same strength and likability in a female character without having to use blatant sex appeal."

Interestingly enough, *BG&E's* protagonist Jade is the brainchild of game designer Michel Ancel (*Rayman, King Kong*). "Rumor has it that Ancel's wife actually served as the main inspiration and muse for Jade's look and personality," informs Miller. "Ancel wanted to create a realistic lead character with a persona that players could connect to and identify with. As you play the game, you really develop an attachment to her."

So with men designing approachable leading ladies of realistic proportions and women enthusing over the feminine aspects of *Playboy* and goth queens, I realized that the issue might have less to do with gender and more to do with how sexuality is perceived in today's games.

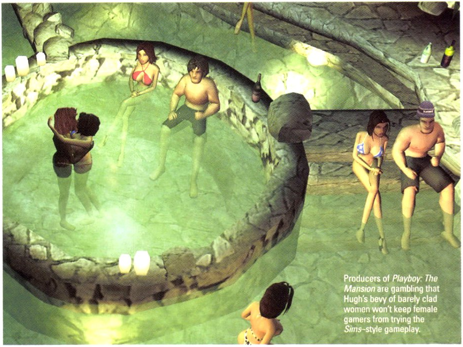
"It's wrong to single out female characters when their male counterparts are usually just as superficial," argues Amy Hennig, game director for Naughty Dog. "We seem to be at that 'naughty' stage, where some developers are testing the limits to see what they can get away with. Games aren't considered just toys anymore, but we haven't matured beyond juvenile titillation."

Karin Yamagiwa, 2D-texture lead for Sucker Punch (*Sly Cooper*) points out, "Sexuality can be powerful, but it depends on how it's used. Games like *Rumble Roses*...some of my female friends find them a bit offensive, while others find them hilarious. Is it for boys to ogle? Of course! But I also know plenty of men who are embarrassed by it."

Anna Kipnis, a programmer for Double Fine Studios, adds, "Games can have story elements and amazing gameplay that can appeal to people regardless of gender. I believe that is what game developers should strive for, and perhaps not enough do."

Aletheia Simonson of Sony CEA's product evaluation group agrees. "Games for women are there; the hurdle is getting a woman who has never played a videogame to try one. It will probably be some time before the game equivalent of the romantic comedy is a blockbuster hit," she explains.

Well, one developer seems to have combined gender equality with



Producers of *Playboy: The Mansion* are gambling that Hugh's bevy of barely clad women won't keep female gamers from trying the *Sims*-style gameplay.

A Konami press release for *Rumble Roses* states, "Modeled in revealing bikinis, these vicious vixens aren't afraid of getting a little dirty. Delivering realistic mud matches, players will literally see mud sliding off these sexy wrestlers after each takedown in the mud pit."

When designing *The Urbz*, *The Sims'* creators specifically addressed female players' desire for more socialization.

mass appeal. EA Maxis' *The Sims* franchise has laid claim to a whopping 50 percent female audience. And it's not as if this series is without its gender stereotypes and sex appeal. One look at *The Urbz: Sims in the City* reveals a prevalence of thong panties and revealing clothing. So just whom is this game meant for?

"Were we planning to entice the male? Well, it does make them look twice in the office!" jokes Virginia McArthur, lead producer on *The Urbz Handheld*. "But you will find when women play, they tend to choose the hip low-riders, as it really fits in with the culture of the location."

As for the secret of *The Sims*' success, McArthur answers confidently: "When we brought *The Urbz* to consoles, we realized that what keeps females interested in our products is the customization and real-life interactions and scenarios they can play out as an Urb. Female players on consoles wanted to spend more time socializing and unlocking items and outfits; they wanted to spend less time on motives and watching animations."

But isn't it generalizations like those above that have been packaged into the dreaded concept of the "girl game"? "It's silly and patronizing to think there's some magic 'girl game' formula, that if the box is pink and there's shopping in the game, girls will buy it in droves," warns Naughty Dog's Hennig, who believes this stereotyping disenfranchises girls all the more. "In general, I think women prefer games that include exploration, problem-solving, customization, and nonlinear play. When we incorporate these elements into our games—whether it's *GTA* or *The Sims*—we're going to attract a wider demographic."

However, despite the recent growth spurt of women making and playing games, there remains a great divide between male and female gamers. Many women report feeling intimidated, whether it's because of an overwhelming amount of product on store shelves or the often aggressive behavior of other gamers. It's no secret that it can be tough to become part of the hardcore online community, even for the most talented players.

In an attempt to bridge the gender gap, Ubisoft has created and funded a fully female gaming team known as the Frag Dolls, a group of hardcore twitch gamers with panache who play *Splinter Cell* and *Rainbow Six*. At first impression, this could be taken as a marketing gimmick by Ubisoft to attract more males to their products. Not true, claims the publisher.

"We're creating role models for a whole legion of girls out there who may have been too intimidated to play games online—or even play at all," explains Ubisoft's online community manager, Nate Mordo. "For those who have bemoaned the fact that in-game heroines have tended to adhere to a certain template, I think that more women playing games means that we'll see more games that cater to this newly diverse audience."

"IT'S SILLY TO THINK THERE IS A MAGIC 'GIRL GAME' FORMULA."

The Frag Dolls are looking to debunk the myths associated with girl gamers and help support other women looking to play. But it's still naïve to think that all gamers are treated equally: One visit to the girl team's forums (www.fragdolls.com) demonstrates the uphill battle to convince male gamers that girls are worthy adversaries and teammates.

So it appears, in fact, that publishers are finally accepting the existence of the once mythical female market. However, whether the industry can mature and evolve to capture their interests still remains to be seen. What I can guarantee is a sentiment echoed by every woman I spoke with: The more women that get involved, the more power they have to evoke change from within. It may take time and effort, but I don't know anyone who ever said getting the girl was easy. «

RIGHT ON THE MONEY

SONY REVEALS PRICING FOR THE PSP IN JAPAN

If you were shocked when Sony announced the price for the PSP in Japan, you weren't the only one. The 19,800 yen (approximately $185) price for the basic PSP package (which includes a battery pack and an AC adapter) is far lower than anyone was originally expecting for a high-end portable system that does more than play games. If anything, it shows how serious Sony is about getting a foothold in the portable market. “There are two things going on,” says Michael Pachter, an analyst with Wedbush Morgan. “Sony's decided to be price competitive, that's pretty obvious. And two, they're going to have more accessories and fewer built-in abilities than people were expecting.”

Even with the relatively low price, Pachter argues that there are still two different markets—one for Nintendo's younger audience and another for the key audience of 18- to 30-year-olds. “Nintendo has segmented the market as under 20, while Sony has segmented the market as 18 and over, so there's not a lot of overlap,” Pachter says. “Sony's pricing is meant to be competitive with Nintendo's, but not to compete head-to-head. It's Sony's intention to grow the install base as rapidly as possible and then sell those people all types of software, whether it's movies, music, or videogame software.”

It's the razors and razor blades model, and Sony knows it's important to get a high install base so it can lure multimedia companies in and gain their support for the PSP platform, since Sony will be making money off of the software and not the hardware. “They learned this lesson with the Betamax,” says Pachter. “You're not going to sell the movie studios on paying a royalty for getting the privilege of putting a movie on this UMD format unless you can show it's in their best interest to do so. A promise that you might sell 20 or 30 million PSPs someday is worthless. Show them an install base of 15 million PSP owners and say to the studios that if they put their movies out on the UMD format, then [the studios will find out] they can sell more discs at $20.”

> “SONY'S PRICING IS MEANT TO BE COMPETITIVE WITH NINTENDO'S.”

Sony has yet to announce pricing for the North American market, but if the company's track record is any indication, the PSP will be similarly priced here in the United States. «

MORE BANG FOR THE BUCK

Priced at 24,800 yen (about $230), the PSP Value Pack (left) will add a 32MB Memory Stick Duo, headphones with a remote control, and a soft case and hand strap to the standard package of PSP, AC adaptor, and battery pack.

JAPANTOWN

SONY LOVES US, AND WE LOVE THEM FOR IT

ANDREW VESTAL
teaches English in the land of our friends to the East, and he knows a good bargain when he sees one.

Last month, after a lackluster showing at the Tokyo Game Show (TGS), I expressed doubts about the PlayStation Portable.

Oh, what a difference a month makes.

19,800 Japanese yen. $185. This simple low price instantly swept aside months of speculation. Supporters and doubters alike were stunned by a price a mere $35 to $45 more than that of the comparatively underpowered Nintendo DS. Yet the PSP wasn't always guaranteed to be so affordable; though no one outside Sony knows the whole story, there appears to have been some last-minute finagling.

In late September, Sony was scheduled to hold a conference where it was assumed the company would announce the PSP's price. One hour before the meeting, however, Nintendo held a surprise press conference to reveal the price of the Nintendo DS—15,000 yen, or $150—which was lower than expected. Sony, presumably caught off guard, delayed the meeting, but Sony Computer Entertainment Germany had already sent out a press release declaring a 33,000 yen price point for the PSP. Once the meeting began, SCE head Ken Kutaragi dismissed that price but refused to give another, saying only that Sony would wait until TGS. But when the show came and went without any news, many wondered: Was Sony seriously going to launch the PSP by the end of the year?

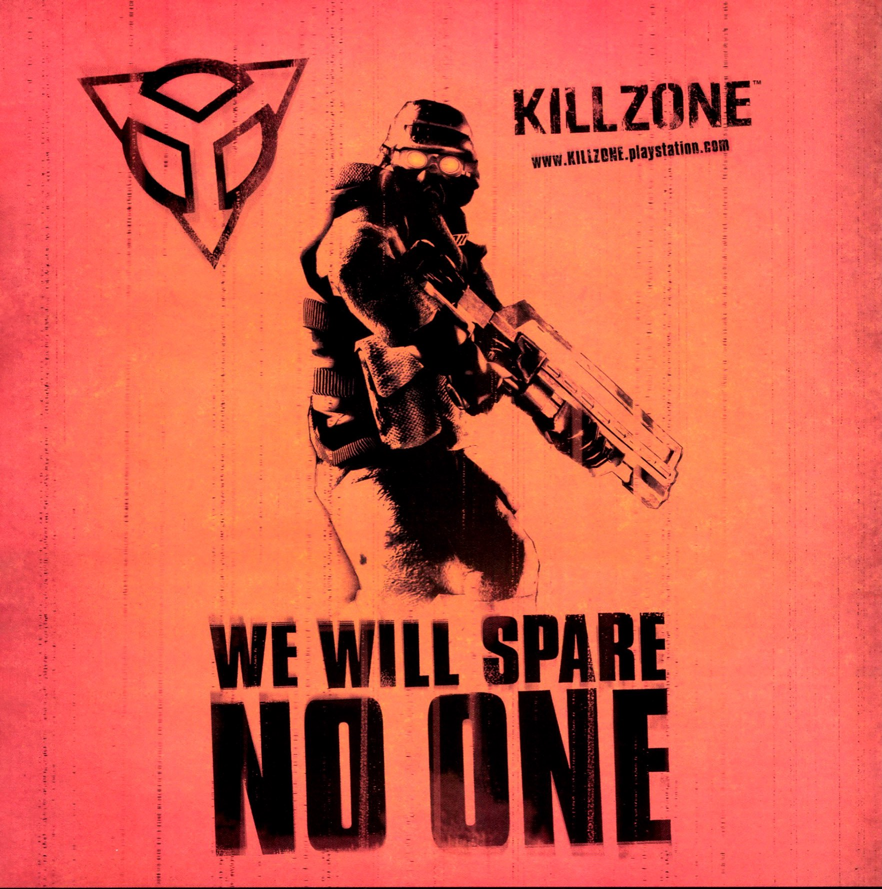
Yes. On October 27, Sony announced a 19,800 yen price and a street date of December 12 for the PSP. Kutaragi commented that before the announcement, the price was secret even to many high-ranking Sony employees. Before the announcement, Japanese industry buzz was suggesting a price of 30,000 yen or more. 19,800 yen wasn't just a pleasant surprise: It was mind-boggling. Sony was making a statement.

> HIT SONY IF YOU WANT, BUT IT'S GOING TO HIT BACK. HARD.

Sony wants you to know that it's deadly serious about the PSP, and the company's aiming for Nintendo's jugular from the start. 19,800 yen is undoubtedly below the initial cost of manufacturing a PSP. Maybe slightly less, maybe by a whole lot, but Sony is definitely losing money with every PSP sold.

By setting such a low initial price, the PSP, like the PS2 before it, has been given an aura of inevitability, and in the game industry, perception is the fastest path to reality. Sony's willingness to take an initial financial hit builds confidence no amount of advertising could provide. Gamers know that Sony's committed. Perhaps more important, developers now know that their PSP games will reach a willing PSP-owning audience, instead of one sitting on the sidelines waiting for a price drop. Eventually, the manufacturing cost will drop and the hardware will become profitable. (Kutaragi claims this will happen by March 2006.) But the effects of this burst of consumer and developer confidence will last the system's lifetime.

Was the PSP's low price a reaction to the Nintendo DS? Undoubtedly. Yet by taking a calculated financial risk up front, Sony may yet have the last laugh. Recently, Sony dropped an additional bombshell: *Resident Evil 4*, exclusive to the Nintendo GameCube for years, would be coming to PlayStation 2 as well. Those with long memories will remember that Sony first entered the videogame market after Nintendo backstabbed the company over a Super Nintendo CD add-on. The pricing machinations of the past month drive home the lesson we already know: Hit Sony if you want, but it's gonna hit back. Hard. «



MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood
Violence
Strong Language

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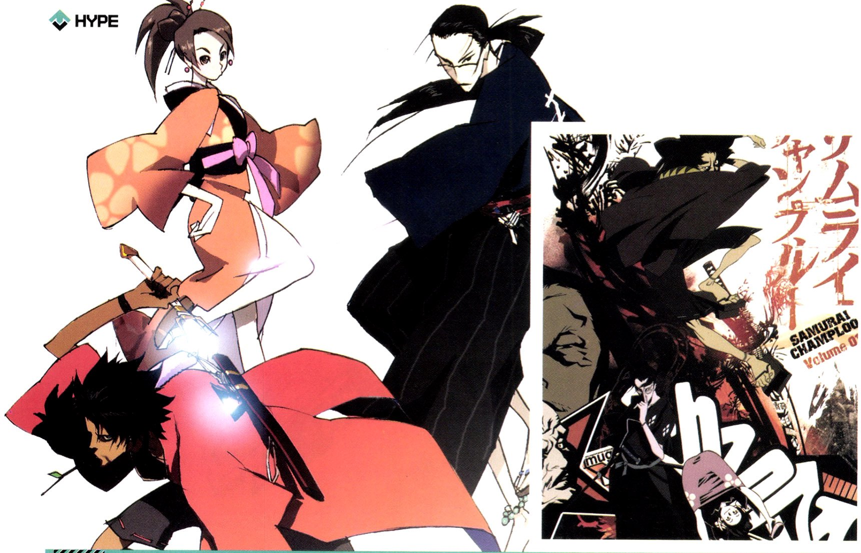

ANIMANIA

NEW HITS FROM THE FALL ANIME SEASON

CHAMPLOONIVERSE

A weak anime season earlier this year in Japan gave us essentially one show worth watching—Shinichiro Watanabe's *Samurai Champloo*. Luckily, it's a definite keeper, the virtual heir to *Cowboy Bebop* when it comes to a completely stylish package.

Like the stir-fry dish that it's named after, *Champloo* throws together a little bit of everything. Three unlikely partners—an Okinawan b-boy swordsman, a nearly silent disgraced samurai, and an ex-waitress who's in search of some obscure sort of revenge—wander west through Japan, bouncing back and forth between dead-serious drama, randomly absurd comedy, and the best samurai action to hit the small screen in ages. Set in the late 17th century, the series takes full advantage of its spot on the timeline to mix in Dutch diplomats and other influences from Japan's gradual exposure to the outside world.

Bebop's jazzy music captured the show's overarching style perfectly. In *Champloo*'s case, a mellow trip-hop soundtrack produced by a crew of four Japanese DJs holds the series together—the music never overpowers the visuals, but it underlines them perfectly. To get an idea of what it's all about, pick up the first DVD from Geneon, which is available on January 11.

WHAT'S NEXT?

In the meantime, a new season begins, and it looks a hell of a lot more promising than the also-rans that accompanied *Champloo* on the tube this summer. Here's a rundown of what's looking good this fall and what could become the next big thing on American DVD next year.

GANKUTSU-OU

In Japanese, that means "King of Caverns," but it's also the Japanese title for Dumas' *The Count of Monte Cristo*, of which this is a beautiful science-fiction retelling. Studio Gonzo unleashes computer graphics overkill in the service of amazing art direction, and it's backed by a killer soundtrack from Jean-Jacques Burnel (bassist for British New Wavers the Stranglers).

GUNDAM SEED DESTINY

The original *Seed* was a big enough hit to inspire another 52 episodes of sequels. In the style of *Zeta Gundam* (on sale now, buy it!), *Destiny* introduces a new cast of characters and a new chapter in the feud between natural humans and their coordinator successors.

BECK (MONGOLIAN CHOP SQUAD)

Based on Harold Sakuishi's long-running *Shonen* magazine strip, it's the story of a struggling indie rock band on the usual tortuous road to the top. Mad House turns in a superb production job, and the music comes from a corps of actual Japanese indie rockers—so far, the show's sound is catchy as all hell.

RING NI KAKERO

It's boxing action based on a '70s-vintage comic from the creator of *Saint Seiya* (aka *Knights of the Zodiac*). As a rule, you can't go wrong with a classic '70s boxing series.

FUUJIN MONOGATARI

Also called *Windy Tales*, it's the latest quirky effort from Production I.G.; this time the story is about young high school girls floating off to adventures in the "festival of the wind."

YAKITATE!! JAPAN

An enterprising young baker uses his "hands of the sun" in his quest to create the greatest bread in all of Japan. Yes, it's an all-out shonen bread-baking story. And it's pretty damn funny, too.

On the OVA front, Gainax has launched *Gunbuster 2*, hoping to prove that zero-G teenage jiggle can still draw the punters 15 years later. Sadly, we're afraid the market may prove them right. « Dave Smith

YOU ARE NOT ALONE

Is your girlfriend or wife or significant other tired of hearing you babble about your favorite anime? Then make some new friends and talk to someone who cares—join animealliance-club.1up.com.

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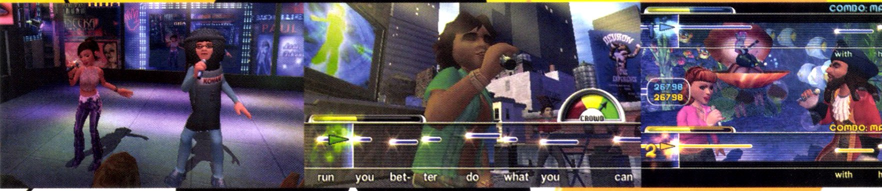

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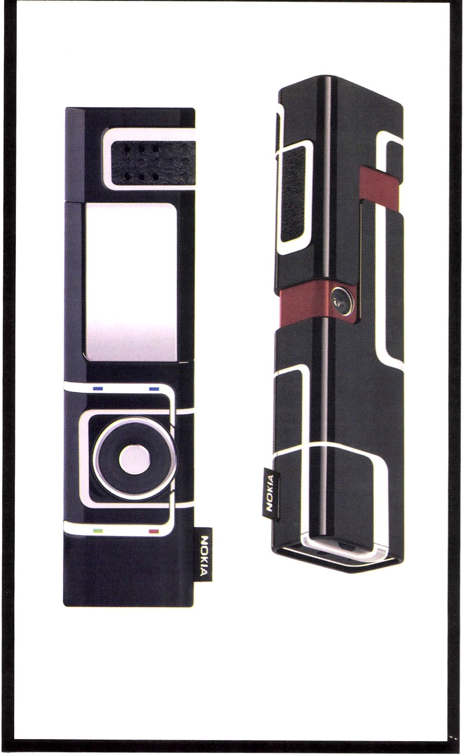
THE LIST

NEW AND HOT THIS MONTH

LIPSTICK-STYLE SPY PHONE

NOKIA 7280

It looks like something from the future, but Nokia's tiny new GSM phone should be available by the end of the year. The 7280 eschews a keypad in favor of a "navispinner" input device, which can be a bit tedious. But the slide-open design and ultracompact form-factor are going to make this *the* hot phone for the holidays. A 640x480 camera, MP3 ringtones, and an integrated FM radio round out this stylish little package. Let's hope the price is as compact.



A CHARITY FOR GAMERS

CHILD'S PLAY

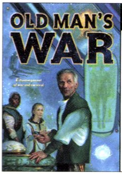
CHILD'S PLAY

Looking to spread a little love around this holiday season? Why not share with some kids who aren't as fortunate as you? Our friends over at Penny Arcade are bringing back their amazing Child's Play charity drive, which has now expanded to provide quality toys and videogames to children's hospitals all over the United States. Visit www.childsplaycharity.org and share your passion for games with kids in Seattle, Oakland, San Diego, Houston, and Washington, D.C.

ONE GIFT TO RULE THEM ALL

LOTR: ROTK PSSEECGS

That's the *Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* Platinum Series Special Extended Edition Collector's Gift Set to you and me. This 80-dollar set includes the extended version of the film (with more than 50 minutes of extra footage) plus a truly incredible sculpture of Minas Tirith, complete with a space beneath for storing your valuables. Also included in the gift set is a DVD feature on the scoring of the films. You *could* buy the regular Extended Edition without the extras—but why?



THE NEXT FRONTIER

OLD MAN'S WAR

OPM columnist John Scalzi's thought-provoking sci-fi debut is the story of a recruit in the Colonial Defence Forces (a military organization made up exclusively of retirees) sent to combat aliens encroaching on Earth's colonies. Critically acclaimed sci-fi author and Nebula Award finalist Cory Doctorow calls *Old Man's War* "gripping and surpassingly original. It's *Starship Troopers* without the lectures. It's *The Forever War* with better sex. It's funny, it's sad, and it's true."

MORE MATRIX THAN YOU COULD EVER WATCH

ULTIMATE MATRIX COLLECTION

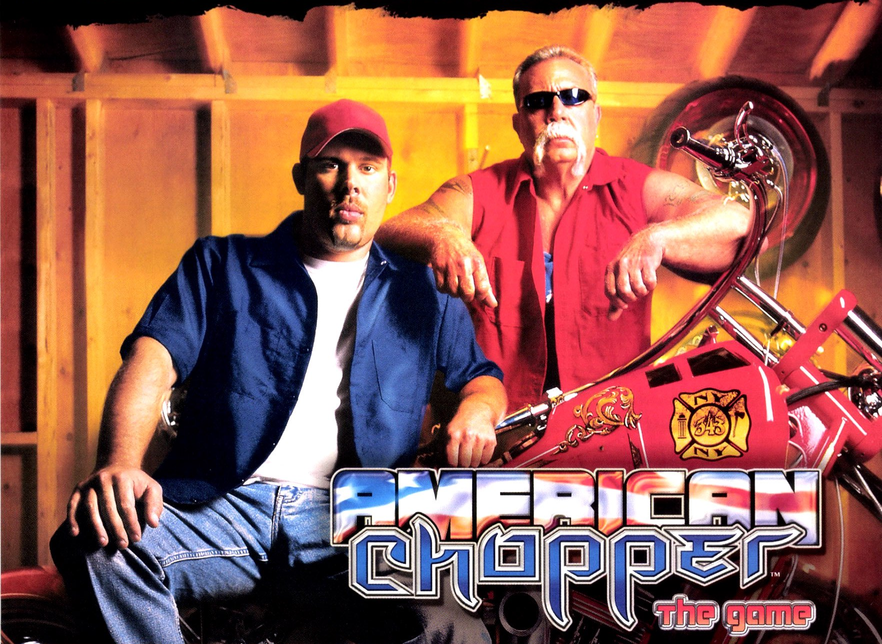
For anyone who wasn't completely disillusioned by the latter two films in this trilogy, we offer this massive 10-DVD collection. It features all three movies (with "revisited" feature discs for each), *The Animatrix*, and more other stuff than we have room to list here. Moreover, this version of *The Matrix* features remastered picture and sound, and each film includes two new audio commentaries. To top it off, the Limited Edition comes with a bust of Neo and an 80-page collector's book.

TATTOOS YOUR MOM WILL LOVE

SLEEVES

Want to look like you're punk rawk without jeopardizing your chances at that cushy white-collar job? Visit sleevesclothing.com for the ultimate in instant cool: a line of shirts designed to look as though you've been ferociously tattooed. Featuring styles for men and women ranging from the traditional color to stark tribal styles, these shirts will run you from 80 to around 100 bucks—a small price to pay for looking cool without actually having to go under the needle.

THE "COOLEST" FAMILY AND THE MOST AWESOME CHOPPERS ARE COMING THIS HOLIDAY!



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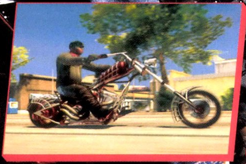
the game



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RATING PENDING
RP
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

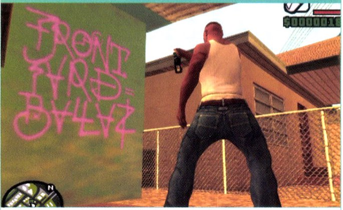
Visit www.esrb.org for updated rating information.

BY THE NUMBERS

IN ASSOCIATION WITH EB GAMES electronics boutique

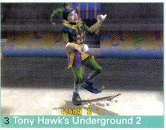
PS2 TOP 20 SALES

With more than 2 million preorders, *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* enjoyed record-breaking sales. Apparently, you don't just love the '90s—you luuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuv the '90s.

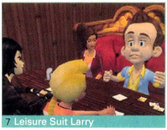


Make your mark in *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas.*

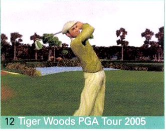
	Title (Publisher)	
1	Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas (Rockstar)	●●●●●
2	NBA Live 2005 (EA Sports)	●●●●
3	Tony Hawk's Underground 2 (Activision)	●●●●◐
4	ESPN NBA 2K5 (ESPN VG)	●●●●
5	Mortal Kombat: Deception (Midway)	●●●●
6	X-Men Legends (Activision)	●●●●
7	Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude (Vivendi Universal)	●●◐
8	FIFA 2005 (EA Sports)	●●●●●
9	Ace Combat 5: The Unsung War (Namco)	●●●●
10	Star Wars Battlefront (LucasArts)	●●●●◐
11	Madden NFL 2005 (EA Sports)	●●●●◐
12	Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2005 (EA Sports)	●●●●◐
13	Def Jam Fight for NY (EA Games)	●●●●◐
14	Katamari Damacy (Namco)	●●●●◐
15	ESPN NFL 2K5 (ESPN VG)	●●●●
16	Shin Megami Tensei: Nocturne (Atlus)	●●●●◐
17	Midway Arcade Treasures 2 (Midway)	●●●●
18	Conflict: Vietnam (Global Star)	●●◐
19	Star Ocean: Till the End of Time (Square Enix)	●●●●
20	Sly 2: Band of Thieves (Sony CEA)	●●●●●



3 Tony Hawk's Underground 2



7 Leisure Suit Larry



12 Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2005

16 Shin Megami Tensei: Nocturne

Source: EB Games, September 2004. Numbers reflect the sales at EB and its affiliated outlets and don't include other retail outlets. That's probably why you'll never see *Deer Hunter* crack the top 10. Japan's top 10 and the top 10 rentals come from other sources. Game descriptions written by the *OPM* staff. The Race Is On sources: BBC.com, Guinness World Records.

PS1 TOP 10 SALES

1	Dragon Ball GT	Bandai
2	Final Fantasy VII	Square Enix
3	Final Fantasy Anthology	Square Enix
4	Final Fantasy Chronicles	Square Enix
5	Ridge Racer	Namco
6	Final Fantasy VIII	Square Enix
7	Final Fantasy Origins	Square Enix
8	NFL GameDay 2004	Sony CEA
9	Final Fantasy IX	Square Enix
10	FIFA Soccer 2005	EA Games

JAPAN'S TOP 10 PS2 GAMES

1	Naruto: Narutimate Hero 2	Bandai
2	Mobile Suit Gundam Seed	Bandai
3	Ace Combat 5: The Unsung War	Namco
4	Tales of Symphonia	Namco
5	Full Metal Alchemist 2	Square Enix
6	Berserk	Sammy
7	Burnout 3: Takedown	EA Games
8	Samurai Warriors: Xtreme Legends	Koei
9	Pachisuro Hokuto no Ken	Sammy
10	Space Battleship Yamato	Bandai

TOP 10 BLOCKBUSTER RENTALS

1	GTA: San Andreas (PS2)	Rockstar
2	Tony Hawk's Underground 2 (PS2)	Activision
3	Star Wars Battlefront (PS2)	LucasArts
4	Ace Combat 5 (PS2)	Namco
5	Men of Valor (XB)	Vivendi Universal
6	Conflict: Vietnam (PS2)	Global Star
7	Star Wars Battlefront (XB)	LucasArts
8	Mortal Kombat: Deception (PS2)	Midway
9	Def Jam Fight for NY (XB)	EA Games
10	Madden NFL 2005 (PS2)	EA Sports

TOP 10 SALES, ALL SYSTEMS

1	GTA: San Andreas (PS2)	Rockstar
2	NBA Live 2005 (PS2)	EA Sports
3	Tony Hawk's Underground 2 (PS2)	Activision
4	ESPN NBA 2K5 (PS2)	ESPN VG
5	SWG: Jump to Lightspeed (PC)	LucasArts
6	Paper Mario 2 (GC)	Nintendo
7	Mortal Kombat: Deception (PS2)	Midway
8	ESPN NBA 2K5 (XB)	ESPN VG
9	Mortal Kombat: Deception (XB)	Midway
10	X-Men: Legends (PS2)	Activision

TREND SPOTTER

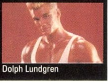
We've seen a lot of our old buddies the Soviets in games as of late. Just remember: Here in United States you might play game, but in Russia, game plays you.

Alien Hominid

Street Fighter

Metal Gear Solid 3

Leisure Suit Larry



Dolph Lundgren

THE RACE IS ON

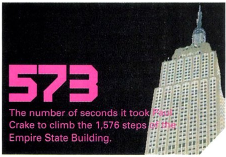
On your marks...

45

The land speed, in miles per hour, of the ostrich, the world's fastest bird.

103

The price, in thousands of dollars, of the world's most expensive speeding ticket.



573

The number of seconds it took Paul Crake to climb the 1,576 steps of the Empire State Building.

Devil May Cry® 3

DANTE'S AWAKENING

March 2005

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PlayStation®2

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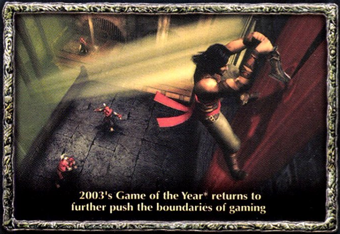
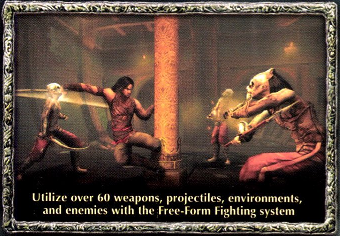
One Fate.
Prince of Persia
Warrior Within
UBISOFT™

PRINCE of PERSIA
WARRIOR WITHIN

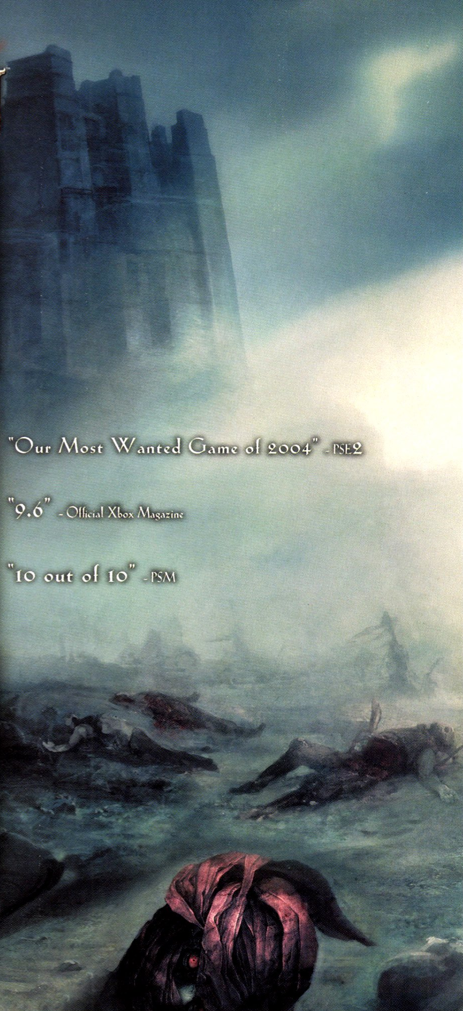


2003's Game of the Year* returns to further push the boundaries of gaming



Utilize over 60 weapons, projectiles, environments, and enemies with the Free-Form Fighting system

Countless hours of action, including soul-shattering boss battles



"Our Most Wanted Game of 2004" - PSE2

"9.6" - Official Xbox Magazine

"10 out of 10" - PSM

princeofpersiagame.com

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GODSMACK

MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Blood and Gore
Intense Violence
Sexual Themes

PC CD-ROM SOFTWARE

XBOX

XBOX LIVE ONLINE ENABLED

NINTENDO GAMECUBE

PlayStation 2

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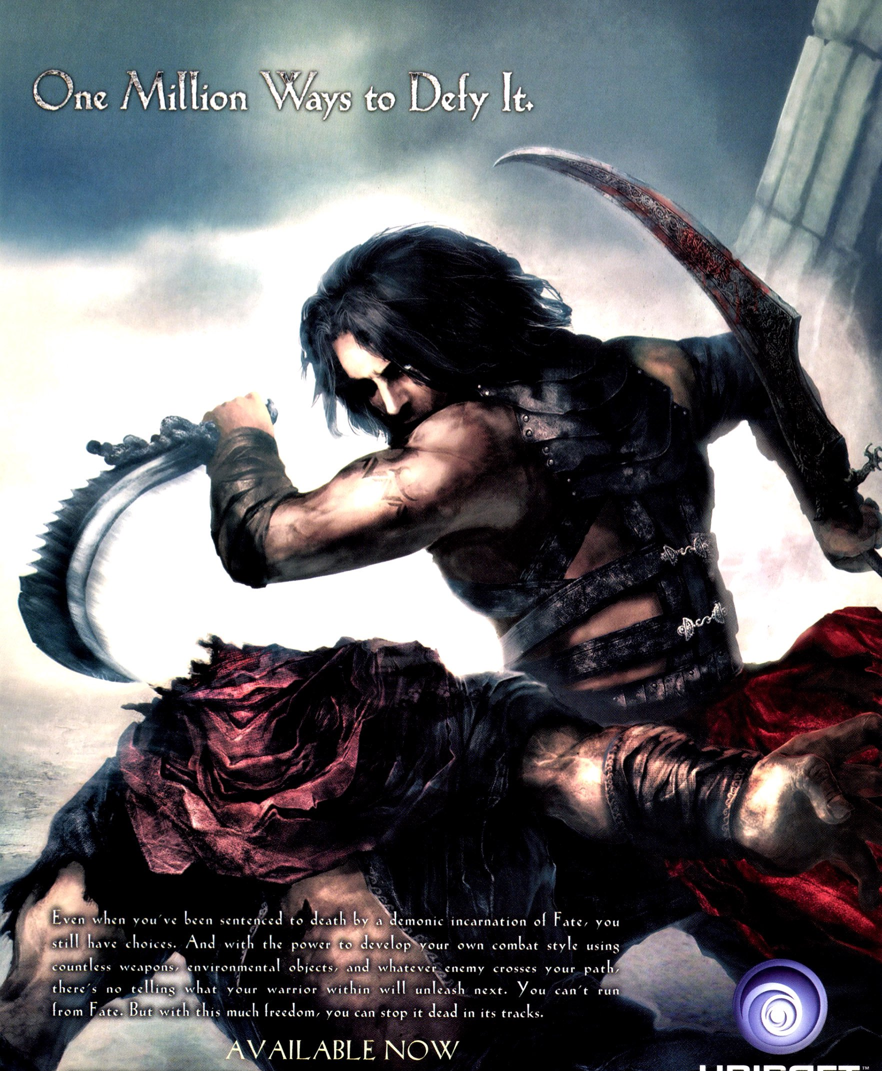
One Million Ways to Defy It.



Even when you've been sentenced to death by a demonic incarnation of Fate, you still have choices. And with the power to develop your own combat style using countless weapons, environmental objects, and whatever enemy crosses your path, there's no telling what your warrior within will unleash next. You can't run from Fate. But with this much freedom, you can stop it dead in its tracks.

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*Game of the Year: Academy of Interactive Arts & Sciences, *U.S. Official PlayStation Magazine*, *Electronic Gaming Monthly*, *Official Xbox Magazine* (Staff Pick), *PSE2*

GRAN TURISMO 4

THE DELAYS, THE CHANGES, THE HIGH EXPECTATIONS...THE FULL STORY

KAZUNORI YAMAUCHI

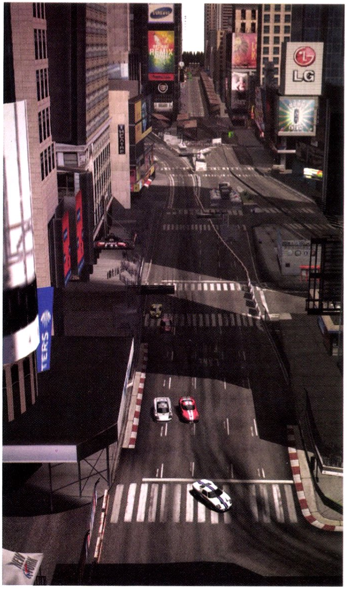
This is the man who makes all your sordid little racing-game fantasies come true. His company, Polyphony Digital, first unleashed *Gran Turismo* onto an unsuspecting PlayStation audience back in 1998. The series has since gone on to sell more than 36 million copies.

After we heard numerous rumors that *GT4* would be delayed yet again, a visit to Sony Computer Entertainment's offices in Foster City, CA, in late October revealed a version of the game that was far from complete. It was clearly getting close, but the various game modes were scattered across an assortment of discs, and the entire game didn't exist on a single disc that you could put into a PS2 and play. Rumors were quashed November 9, however, when the game was finally declared "finished" by the team at Polyphony Digital.

Since late summer, we have been trotting across the globe to keep tabs on producer Kazunori Yamauchi's masterpiece, with the hope of bringing you a review of the game this month, but in the final stages of production, *GT4* was being rebuilt on a daily basis. "We saw dramatic changes daily," an SCEA spokesperson tells us. "With *GT3*, those revisions went all the way up to the wire, and the final code was flown from Japan and hand-delivered to the plant for it to be manufactured. There's a good chance that's going to happen again."

After the Tokyo Game Show in late September, a visit to Polyphony Digital's impressive new headquarters just south of Japan's capital allowed us to see how the 75-member team works under its influential leader. "Yamauchi is the core of everything," says the game's U.S.-based producer, Taku Imasaki. "Everything about the game is driven by him, and his personality is key to getting the game done. He's a remarkably powerful man within the Sony collective and somewhat unique because of his ability to say 'no' to executives." Like U.S.-based studio Naughty Dog, Polyphony is a wholly owned subsidiary of Sony Computer Entertainment and enjoys a crown-jewel–like presence within the organization. Yamauchi is the president of Polyphony but is also a senior vice president of SCEI, and as such, is deeply involved in numerous projects outside of *Gran Turismo*. "He has a lot of say in everything," Imasaki reveals. "I guess that's what comes from being the guy behind a franchise that's now sold more than 36 million copies. He's very influential on both the hardware and software sides of the business, and just recently, he's become much more involved with other first-party teams to encourage the sharing of technology. You'll actually start to see some of the fruits of this next year."

Is it all of these distractions that led to the delays and changes we've seen these past few months? The sudden removal of the online mode was met with doubt and derision from hardcore gamers used to hopping online with every other racing-game release this year. "I actually have a working disc of the online version on my desk right now," says Imasaki



GRAN TURISMO U.S. SALES DATA

We all know it sold a lot of copies worldwide, right? But how many has it sold here in the United States? Fortunately, we have that information right here ready for you to bore people at parties with.

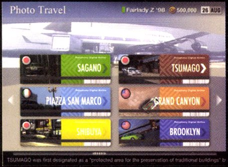
Gran Turismo - 3.9 million
Gran Turismo 2 - 3.8 million
Gran Turismo 3 - 6 million

when we meet up with him again in mid-November, just as the game is starting to go through its test sessions in preparation for its scheduled December 14 release. "The problem is that when you have such a beautiful game, you really want to be able to keep everything within your control. Yamauchi is a perfectionist, and he wants to make sure that the game retains its beauty and doesn't go out with any weird bugs that would make the experience seem less real. I think it was a wise decision for him to pull the online mode when he did because it has really helped keep the project on schedule. A lot of online games are released and make you live with a lot of problems. The *GT* team members are very critical of their own work, they're artists, and they're very concerned about maintaining the *Gran Turismo* magic in every mode."

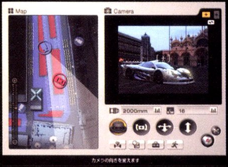
So if Imasaki has the online mode on his desk right now, how is it? And is the subsequent release that Yamauchi alluded to at the Tokyo Game Show a certainty? "When we play internally, it works fine," Imasaki admits. "We don't want to sacrifice anything, though, and there are concessions you have to make when you consider the ramifications of network code. Getting the game out is our main concern, and I really don't know how much longer we'd need to make [the online mode] right. Maybe two more months? Maybe more? I really don't know. What you need to remember is that online wasn't ever the core of the game. There are still LAN modes, though. You can play a six-player game in the new version of what used to be the iLink battle mode in *GT3*, only now it looks better and it's more stable."

Over the past year, it has become increasingly clear that the game is incredibly ambitious. It boasts a 650-car roster, a completely overhauled physics engine, a new artificial intelligence system, Dolby Pro Logic II support, and completely remodeled tracks. There's also the matter of the new photo mode, the oft-misunderstood B-Spec mode, and the whole notion of "the human element," which is essentially the fact that the *Gran Turismo* world is now full of people, including drivers in the cars. Surely meeting the expectations of fans with a franchise this big is a complete nightmare? "The even-numbered games are always the hard

YOU NEED TO REMEMBER THAT ONLINE WASN'T EVER THE CORE."



TSUMAGO was first designated as a "protected area for the preservation of traditional buildings" b



カメラの向きを変えます

WHAT DO ALL THOSE BUTTONS DO?

The interface for the photo mode isn't as complicated as it looks. You position the car within the red areas on the map, the camera within the blue. Then you can tilt and rotate the camera to get the best angle (using the analog sticks), and zoom in or out as you see fit.

PHOTO MODE

COULD YOU TAKE MY PICTURE? 'CUZ I WON'T REMEMBER

When Yamauchi announced the new photo mode in *GT4* at E3 back in May, a lot of hardcore gamers questioned the wisdom of diverting energy into something so frivolous while we were all still waiting for the game to be finished. "We wanted to create something that would appeal to the player and be highly realistic," Yamauchi tells us. "It was easy to include the functions that make up the photography mode, but it was difficult to get it to be high enough quality that you couldn't tell that it was from a game. If someone picked up a photo and automatically thought it was from a game, they would say, 'So what?' It had to be something special."

The mode is divided into two different formats. First is the photo drive, which allows you to take shots during a race and play around with the zoom, depth of field, and motion-blur effects that the software offers. The second is the photo travel mode, which lets you drop one of the cars from your garage into any of the locations listed here. You can save up to 50 photos to your memory card and even print them to a USB printer. (As we go to press, only Epson has a printer with PS2 drivers, but SCEA informs us that a number of other companies have committed to supporting the game.) The simulated camera in the game is the equivalent of a 1.2-megapixel device, which allows for focus and exposure control, as well as a number of different filters. When printed, the images are shockingly realistic, especially in the more urban locations like New York or Tokyo.

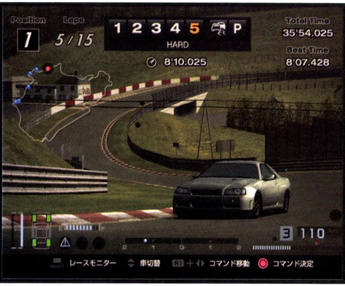
FIFTEEN LOCATIONS FOR PHOTO TRAVEL

Gion District – Kyoto, Japan
Nanzenji Temple – Kyoto, Japan
Sagano – Kyoto, Japan
Tsumago – Nagano, Japan
Piazza San Marco – Venice, Italy
Shibuya – Tokyo, Japan
Tokyo International Forum – Tokyo, Japan
Shiga Kogen – Nagano, Japan
Brooklyn, New York
Times Square - New York City
Asian fish market
Fremont Street - Las Vegas
Louisburg Square - Boston
Grand Canyon - Arizona
Kobe - Japan

WHAT'S B-SPEC ALL ABOUT?

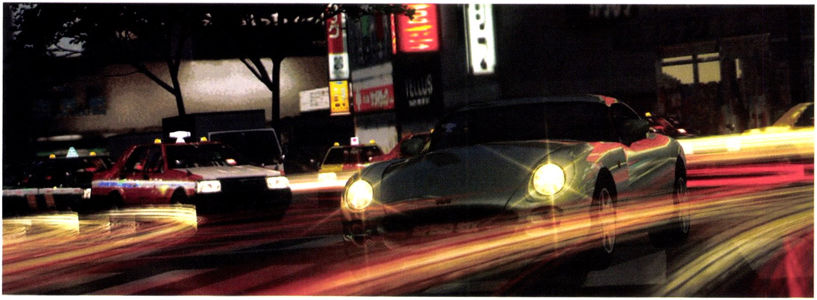
SIT BACK AND JUST WATCH, MOSTLY

Think of it as being like a version of the replay mode that you get to tinker with. Although it's been described as "*Gran Turismo Tactics*" by some observers, it's by no means as complicated as you might think. "That was a worry of mine when I was making B-Spec," Yamauchi explains. "The original idea was to make a simulation mode where you manage the race from the pit. We originally had a lot of commands and instructions, but we gradually got rid of some and developed just a core instruction set that would keep things simple. I've always been about racing—obviously, that's what I do. I've been racing for many years, but sometimes, I just like to sit and drink coffee while I watch what's going on, without actually having to really do all that racing."



TWO WAYS TO PLAY

B-Spec can be enjoyed from two different views. First there's the broadcast view (left) where you can play around with different camera views, and then there's the hardcore stat-tracking screen (below) that allows you to just tinker with, and watch, the telemetry of your racer.



ones," Imasaki concedes. "[*GT*] and [*GT3*] were so much easier because they were each the first iteration of a technology on their respective systems and they became tech demos for the hardware. The even-numbered games have to be an expansion of that. You can't rely on the technology so much, and you're really obliged to provide much more volume. *GT4* has to be bigger and better-looking than *GT3*, it has to have more features, and it has to be something that consumers can sit down and play for six months. If you look back at *GT2*, people played it for a year and maybe didn't open everything up. *GT4* will be the PS2 *GT2*."

Time spent with near-final code revealed an experience far more complex than what previous iterations provided. The world of *Gran Turismo* is now navigated through a map that has gameplay types grouped into "villages" based on a certain theme. You have the license-test villages (yes, they're back, and yes, you do have to complete all of them if you want to experience all the different modes), the career mode village, the car village, and many more. Entering each of these communities provides a host of options. Visiting a car village provides access to both new and classic cars from the manufacturer, as well as an expanded array of tuning options. "The mods we offer are basically the same as those in *GT2*," Imasaki informs us. "The difference is that there's much, much more depth now, and the number of subcategories is far greater. If you look at, say, the different options for brakes, you'll find that there are many more manufacturers represented. We also have aerodynamic parts, like body kits and spoilers, this time, all of which are official, just like the cars. We still don't offer decals or vinyls, though, mainly because we have a hard enough time with all the approvals necessary for the licenses we have right now. Slapping stickers on things would make it even more complicated."

"THE EVEN-NUMBERED GAMES ARE ALWAYS THE HARD ONES."

Since the original game was released in May 1998, the series has quickly established itself as a force in automotive media because of its realism and attention to detail. Early on, it was a challenge for the team to get all of the manufacturers on board, though. "Oh my god, yes," Imasaki laughs. "Early on, we had to practically beg them to work with

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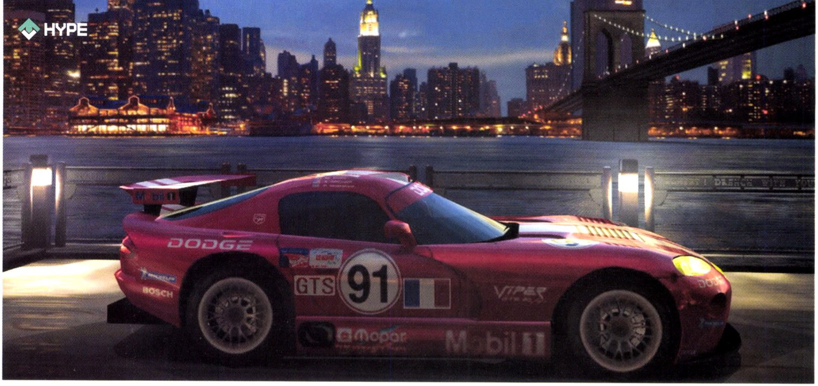
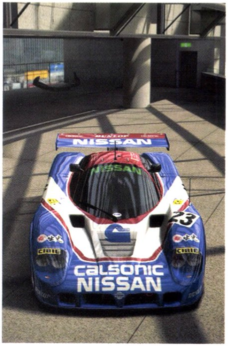
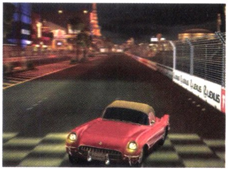


GRAN TURISMO FOR BOYS

At the completion party for *Gran Turismo 4* in Tokyo November 9, Yamauchi announced his pet side project aimed at 8-year-olds, dubbed *Gran Turismo for Boys.* "I'd like young kids to understand more fully the fun of cars," he said. "Using the entertainment power of games, we'll be increasing the number of car lovers 20 years or so down the road. If we don't grow to love cars in youth," he continued, "we become adults who are uninterested in cars." This is not a joke, we assure you.





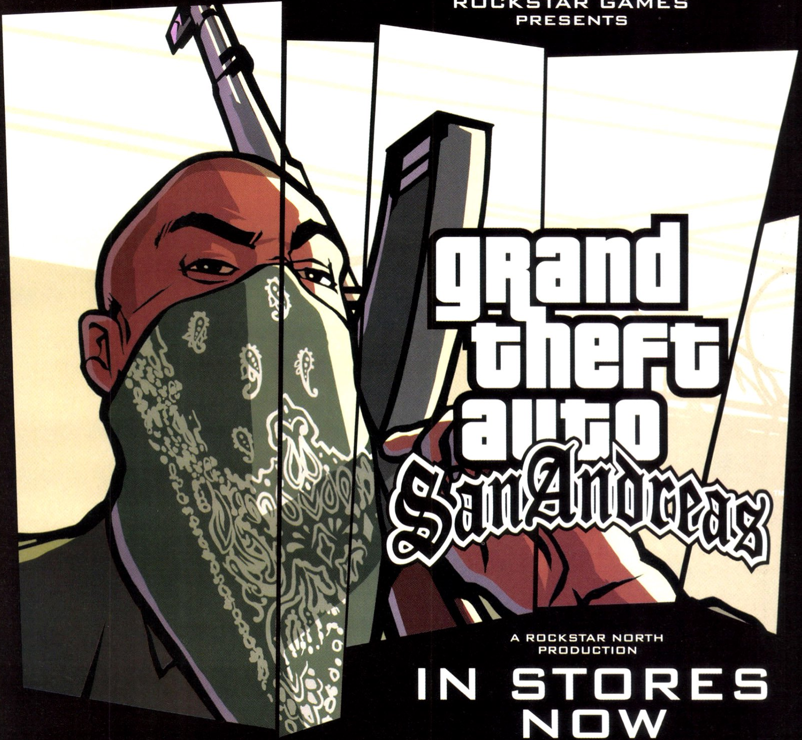
us, but it's completely different now. They really want to work with us, and they just load us up with information and requests. It's a hard balancing act, trying to manage what our needs for the game are versus the car manufacturers using it as something that they can use to try and make a car cool. In fact, it's arguable that one of the reasons *GT4* has been delayed so long is because of all the side projects we've been doing for promotions and auto shows. We've had special single-make versions of the game for maybe 30 or 40 different projects—like BMW for the 1 Series, or the promotion we did with Toyota for the Prius, where you got a special demo if you requested a car brochure. We put a lot of time and resources into working with all of the manufacturers, and it's really paid off. Not only do we work with them on all these special versions, but some car manufacturers even use the *GT* engine to help design their cars. They can build the car with our engine and see how it will look in a variety of different environments. It's not just the look, though; the physics engine is so good that they can get a feel for the way it will handle as well. It's that good now. Y'know, I think Yamauchi's ultimate goal is to one day make a car himself.

"A core part of the development of *Gran Turismo* is giving priority to the relationships with the car companies," Imasaki tells us. "It's more than just a game now. Yamauchi really gives me a hard time if I'm not talking to car manufacturers enough. That's where we're different from some of the other racing games out there. We're very focused on the relationships and on the reality of the experience," he says. "You know, picking 650 cars for the final game was a really long process," he laughs. "Building the cars themselves took even longer. It takes about three weeks to a month to produce each car in the game, and we had a team of about 30 to 40 artists doing just that. Every car gets the full treatment, whether it's the concepts, the classic cars that we had to track down through clubs, or the cars we work directly with the manufacturers on. We traveled all over the place to work on the cars. We saw collections in Vegas, Detroit, even Jay Leno's collection in Los Angeles."

> "CAR MANUFACTURERS USE THE *GT* ENGINE TO HELP DESIGN THEIR CARS."

So how is a car built for the game? "Sometimes the manufacturers

ROCKSTAR GAMES
PRESENTS



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Blood and Gore
Intense Violence
Strong Language
Strong Sexual Content
Use of Drugs

PlayStation 2

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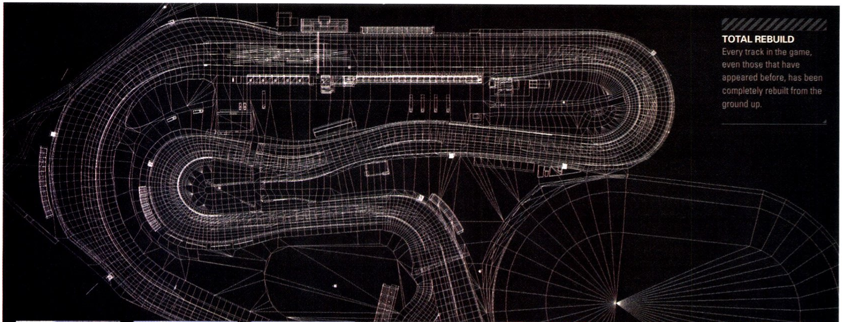
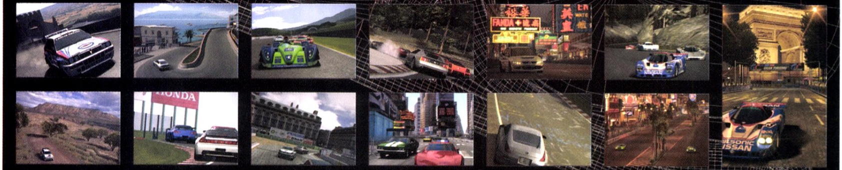


TOTAL REBUILD

Every track in the game, even those that have appeared before, has been completely rebuilt from the ground up.



THAT'S A LOT OF TRACKS

EVER WANTED TO RACE A FORD TAURUS AROUND THE NURBURGRING? NO? WELL, NOW YOU CAN ANYWAY

"Very early on in the process for *Gran Turismo 4*," Imasaki explains, "the programmers found a much better way to process graphics on the PS2. As a result, we completely redesigned all of the tracks and courses in the game so that they would be more accurately represented. Whether you're looking at details that are far away or close up, you'll notice that everything looks much better than before." The list that follows shows you all of the different locations in the game, and the variation in the races comes from running them in each direction, along with the addition of environmental effects, like rain, for different races.

CLOSED-CIRCUIT COURSES

Fuji Speedway '80 (Japan) – The original Fuji Speedway, which was known as one of the fastest tracks in the world.

Fuji Speedway '90 (Japan) – The current Fuji Speedway.

Fuji Speedway '05 (Japan) – The new Fuji Speedway to debut next year.

Tsukuba Circuit 2000 (Japan) – Sacred ground for testing various production and sports cars in Japan.

Twin Ring Motegi - Full course and oval track (Japan) – International road course, and the only 1.5-mile oval course in Japan built for Indy Car racing.

Suzuka Circuit - Full Course (Japan) – The site for the Japanese Formula One Grand Prix.

Laguna Seca Raceway (USA) – Located near Monterey, CA, this track returns from *Gran Turismo 3 A-Spec* but has been completely remodeled by the Polyphony team.

Infineon Raceway (USA) – Located in Sonoma County, near San Francisco, Infineon Raceway is a unique road course that plays host to NASCAR, NHRA, LeMans, and various other auto-racing competitions.

Nurburgring Nordschleife (Germany) – The world's most challenging course is approximately 13 miles long and contains 176 turns. This track is known as a proving ground for many sports cars from around the world.

CITY COURSES

Tokyo R246 – Returning from *Gran Turismo 3 A-Spec*, this track has been completely remodeled by the team.

Seattle – Also returning from *Gran Turismo 3 A-Spec*, this track now boasts a higher level of realism. The time setting has changed from sunset to midday with clear skies.

New York City – This track is in the center of Manhattan and includes Broadway, Times Square, Fifth Avenue, and Central Park.

Hong Kong – Developed and created with full support from the Hong Kong Government Tourism Department.

Las Vegas Drag Strip – A quarter-mile drag race down the Las Vegas Strip.

George V Paris – Race through the streets of Paris, on Les Champs-Elysees, and past such popular sites as the Arc de Triomphe.

Opera Paris – Additional course through the streets of Paris.

Cote D'Azur – Racecourse through the streets of Monaco.

Citta di Aria – Racecourse through an Italian city.

Costa di Amalfi – Race on the island of Capri in Italy.

NATURE- AND FANTASY-BASED COURSES

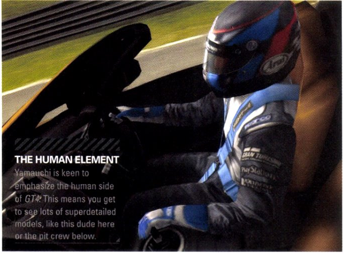
Grand Canyon – The course runs along the rim of the Grand Canyon and is ideally suited for rally racing.

Ice Arena – A new rally-style course in the snow and ice that brings a new style of gameplay to the series.

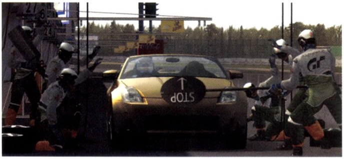
Swiss Alps – The first of many fantasy courses that returns from past *Gran Turismo* games, only completely remodeled.

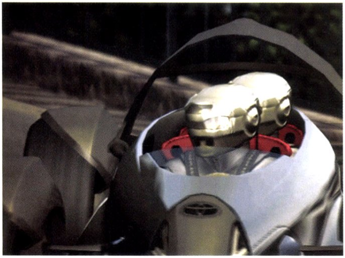
Other reworked tracks include:

Grand Valley
Midfield Raceway
High Speed Ring
Tahiti Maze
Deep Forest
Autumn Ring
Special Stage Route 5
Trial Mountain
Snow Lake
Motorsports Land
Autumn Maze
Super Speedway
Kashiwa



THE HUMAN ELEMENT
Yamauchi is keen to emphasize the human side of *GT4*. This means you get to see lots of superdetailed models, like this dude here or the pit crew below.





MUSIC TO DRIVE BY

THE ULTIMATE *GT4* MIX TAPE

"The soundtrack selection is definitely more eclectic this time," Imasaki tells us. "Chuck [Doud, the music director for Sony Computer Entertainment America] decided we wanted more funk in the game. Why? Because we like it. We have a lot of different songs from different categories. There's rock, techno, classic rock, hip-hop, and funk. We definitely concentrated on what we think is more 'racing-friendly' music this time. *GT3* was probably a bit too mainstream for its own good, so we just looked for fast-paced stuff that we really liked.

Here's the full track listing from the game. It's unlikely that Sony will be releasing it as a soundtrack CD.

"Till the Break" A Skillz
"Slip and Slide" A Skillz
"Start the Car" Apollo 440
"Hold the Brakes" Apollo 440
"Runaround" Ario
"Hot Rod Honeymoon" Jeff Beck
"So Long Baby Goodbye" The Blasters
"Let's Roll" Bootsy Collins
"D-Greasy Rides" Bootsy Collins
"Don't Mean a Thing" Borialis
"Super Bad Part 1, 2 & 3" James Brown
"Apology for Non Symmetry" Chronic Future
"Machine Gun" The Commodores
"Born Too Slow" (Remix) Crystal Method
"Real Dream" Deepsky
"Nitro" Dieselboy + Kaos
"Car Crash" Dirty Americans
"I Don't Want to Know" The Donnas
"Getaway" Earth, Wind & Fire
"Once You Go, You Go" Identity
"Roll over DJ" Jet
"Nothingwrong" Jimmy Eat World
"Freewheel Burning" Judas Priest
"Short Burning Fuse" Less Than Jake
"Gameplay" Mr. Natural
"Murder" Papa Roach
"Not Listening" Papa Roach
"Funny Little Feeling" Rock N Roll Soldiers
"I Don't Care" The Roots
"Summer Song" Joe Satriani
"You Must Follow" Stratus
"It Don't Mean Nothing" Will.I.Am
"Drop on You" Will.I.Am
"Rockstar" The Wylde Bunch
"Ready to Rock" X-Ecutioners
"Oh Yeah" Yello

GRAN TURISMO 4 NIKE LTD. EDITION

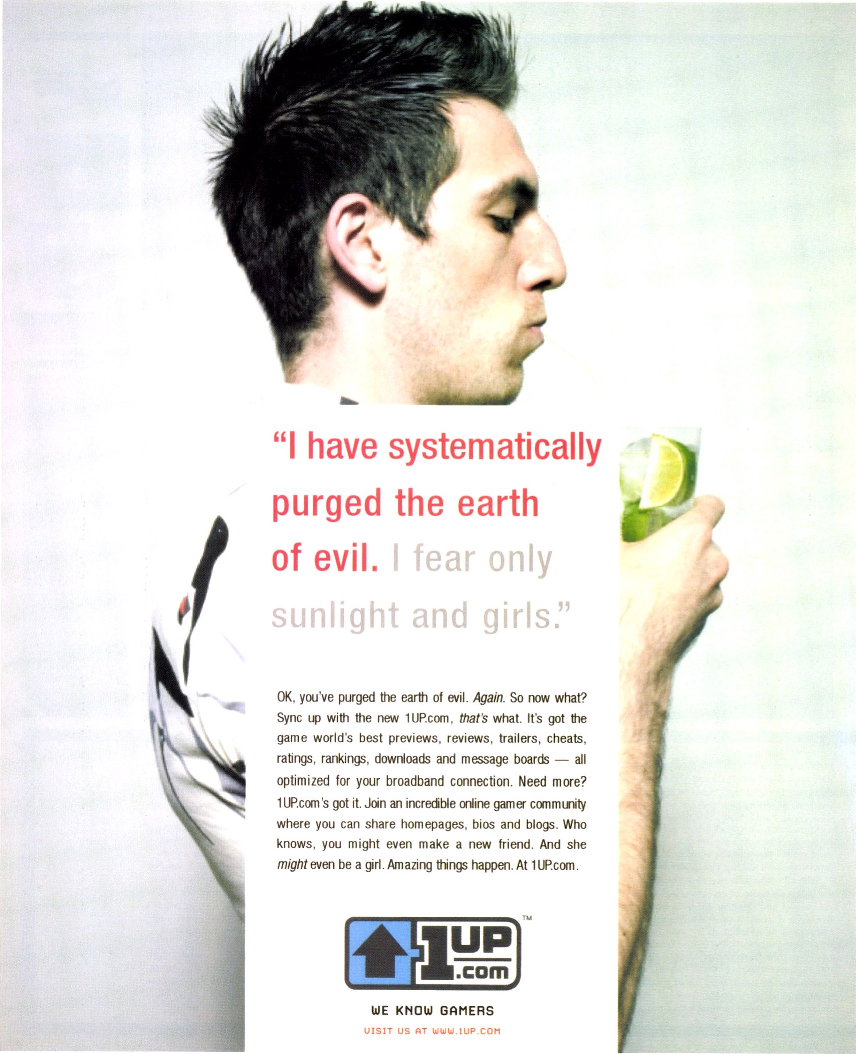
For the price of 33,600 yen ($318), you can get a copy of the game, a Nike shirt, a pair of Shox sneakers, and an aluminum suitcase to carry the lot in. Only 1,000 examples of the set are planned (250 each of four shoe sizes) and sadly, it isn't coming here. To rub the international-exclusivity in even further, the package also includes a cleverly hidden bonus item for the game. Snapping a picture of the pattern on the shirt with an EyeToy that is plugged in to *GT4* will unlock a hidden Nike One racecar which was designed in collaboration with Nike and Saleen (who makes the amazing S7 supercar).

provide precise enough CAD data," Imasaki explains, "but for the most part, we'd line the cars up and process them. We'd have maybe 10 designers from the team come to the United States with their cameras and their recording gear, and we'd go and shoot the cars from every possible angle. For each car we'd take maybe 300 to 500 photos, and then we'd record about half an hour's worth of engine sounds to DAT. There'd be a mic on the engine under the hood and one near the exhaust, and we'd record the engine sounds through the rev range. Sometimes we'd process 50 cars like this at a time."

With all of this attention to detail, how did the team react to the apparent changing tastes of gamers when it comes to racing games? Since *GT3*, we've had *Need for Speed Underground*, a host of pretenders, and of course, *Burnout 3*. What if tastes are changing? "I think people will always appreciate what *GT* is," Imasaki says. "It's a long-term brand, it's an evergreen game. Think of it as being like classical music to their hip-hop. We're the Rolex to their Spoon. There will always be games that tap into the current fashion, but *GT* doesn't work like that. Those guys will always need to look at what's next because they'll be forced to decorate their game based on what the current trend is. Right now, there are two other games coming out that follow our way of thinking. Microsoft is working on *Forza*, and Konami has *Enthusia*. Konami, I think, may be taking the whole notion of realism perhaps a little too seriously, but if they get it right, it will maybe last longer. EA realized a while ago that they couldn't make *Need for Speed* compete with *Gran Turismo*, so they very wisely took the franchise in a different direction."

But what of the changing fashions with regard to cars? Surely *GT* has to acknowledge the tastes that are dominating car culture right now? "Right now, it's huge," Imasaki admits, "but for how long? We watch that stuff, obviously, and we've integrated some of it into the game, but we have to be careful. *Gran Turismo* has to retain its focus. You'll see tuner brands in the game, and there'll be a nitrous option for the first time, but it's more about acknowledging that culture rather than rebuilding the game around it. Your garage in *GT4* can hold 1,000 cars. If you want to, you could do 500 different Honda Civics with every mod the game offers, but that's still just a small part of what we're about.

"We go to the SEMA [Specialty Equipment Market Association] show every year, and we do the *Gran Turismo* Awards there, and those tuner guys tell us that we should loosen up a bit," Imasaki says, "but the bottom line is that *GT* has to be the flagship game for the console, so we have to acknowledge a much broader culture." « John Davison



“I have systematically purged the earth of evil. I fear only sunlight and girls.”

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REVIEWS

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MGS3

SNAKE EATS SNAKES AND TAKES NAMES

OFFICIAL U.S. PLAYSTATION MAGAZINE

[★]

GAME OF THE MONTH

RATING KEY

Octagons. Stomps. Ocs. Blargs. Call our rating symbols what you will—just know that any game that receives five of 'em is something truly special that deserves a spot in your collection. On the other hand, a 2.5 is merely mediocre. And a 0.5? Well...at least they're fun to rip apart.

[⬢⬢⬢⬢⬢]

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OFFICIAL U.S. PLAYSTATION MAGAZINE

GAME OF THE MONTH

METAL GEAR SOLID 3:

SNAKE SHOWS US WHY HE'S BIG BOSS

At the end of *Metal Gear Solid 2,* Solid Snake says, "We need to pass the torch and let our children read our messy and sad history by its light." Interestingly enough, *MGS3* isn't a continuation of Solid Snake and Otacon's attempts to solve the mystery of the Patriots—it's a piece of sad, messy history brought to light. It's the revelation of what shaped Big Boss (yes, you play him and only him, though he carries the code name "Snake" during the game) in 1964 to make him such a legend in the 21st century.

MGS3 is a throwback to not just the '60s, but to the overall experience of the original *MGS*. Kojima has scaled back on the sheer nonsense of *MGS2* and provided a more straightforward story for *MGS3*. While absurdity and conspiracy still play a role in the story, the actual objective is a lot easier to digest than the "you're playing a giant simulator of the previous game" plot of *MGS2*. In fact, not only is the story leaner and more focused—it's actually more personal and even character driven.

While *MGS3* still carries the "nukes are bad" theme, the central story is more about Snake's own personal issues. The first part of the game, Operation Virtuous Mission, is a normal stealth mission that ends catastrophically and gives way to Operation Snake Eater, which takes place on August 30, 1964. The story still requires Snake to find and defeat a mechanical walking tank, but the real focus is on Snake coming to grips with the end of Virtuous Mission. Without spoiling it, Snake goes through a lot of pain, both physical and emotional (oddly reminiscent of Rambo's). As a result, the final boss battle isn't merely a fight against someone who was standing near a Metal Gear when it was destroyed—it's something with a more personal and, strangely, emotional connection.

While the story has shed the gross excess of the previous games, the gameplay has been fleshed out more. *MGS3* doesn't have the soliton radar, but its absence means that you now have to manage three well-balanced substitutes: a motion detector that sees everything that's moving, a loud sonar device that detects everything, and a sensor that audibly alerts you to enemies but has no visual component. The camera is more like *MGS*'s than *Splinter Cell*'s (occasionally, it does silly things like face toward Snake), so its limited range of movement necessitates using

WE PLAYED THEM FOR YOU:
If you missed our summary of *MGS* and *MGS2* in the November issue, here's another one:
Solid Snake sneaks into a base in Alaska, where he finds out that the lead designer for Metal Gear REX loves anime, is asked "Can love bloom on the battlefield?" and gets a lecture about nukes and genetics. In *MGS2*, Solid Snake disappears, only to be replaced by plucky newbie operative Raiden. Raiden gets naked, fights a whole lotta Metal Gear RAYs, and learns that the entire game was an elaborate simulator based on *MGS*. Oh, and Liquid is living inside Revolver Ocelot's arm.

SNAKE EATER

the various gadgets and the first-person view frequently.

Consequently, *MGS3* is now a slower, more deliberately paced game than its predecessors. Using your equipment and camouflages to locate and then prepare for your targets is a lot more rewarding than checking radar. Maximum stealth requires slow, methodical movement anyway, so going into your menu to change your camouflage doesn't slow down an already slow moment. If you want to move things along faster, you're certainly welcome to just not care about your camouflage index and shoot everything with a shotgun.

There was much worrying about the food system being a totally annoying aspect of the game. It's actually integrated fairly well—it's easy to maintain and is a hassle only if you forget about it for two straight hours or so. Food itself is supereasy to obtain, and on top of that, most of that food does a pretty good job of restoring your stamina. Only one area in particular demands that you eat regularly, and besides that, as long as you remember to eat the occasional python, crab, or ramen noodle, then you'll be absolutely fine.

The cure system (a new submenu where you treat serious wounds) has a chance to break up the game's pace, if you let it. Play as an aggressive, gung ho Snake (like I did), and you're likely to get shot or stabbed or burned multiple times, which leads to the penalty of treating those wounds frequently. Play a little sneakier, and you're less likely to get tagged, which means less treatment. However, everyone will run into the cure system during boss battles. No matter what you do, you're going to get smacked around, and you'll have to treat your wounds as a result.

YES, YOU PLAY BIG BOSS, AND ONLY BIG BOSS, THE WHOLE TIME.

Besides the survival-themed aspects of *MGS3's* gameplay, there's also the close-quarters combat system, which makes combat a lot more

COBRA AND YOU

TAKE ON THE BIG BOYS

Kojima is known for making, ahem, quirky bosses, and *MGS3* is no slouch in that department. What follows is a spoiler-free description of each one and tips to help you defeat them.

THE PAIN: How do you top an obese bomb expert on roller skates? How about a guy who uses bees as weapons! His outlet is dishing out incredible pain—seeing how messed up his face is, he has probably felt a lot of pain and decided to turn it against people.
TIP: Bees hate water.

THE FEAR: He babbles about the fear of fighting the unknown or whatnot. His main deal is that he's kind of like Spider-Man and the Predator put together.
TIP: Look up using either your ears or your heat-enhanced vision.

THE END: Quite possibly the hardest boss in the game. He should technically be dead, but he's brought back to life just to kill Snake. Imagine if the Sniper Wolf fight took 45 minutes, and that's almost what you have to deal with for The End.
TIP: Walk silently and carry a big boomstick (and some thermal goggles).

THE FURY: Our favorite character design for the Cobra Unit, and we want to know what word is etched onto his helmet. True to his name, he's totally angry at the world. Every time you hit him, he screams, "Son of a B-I-T-C-H!!!!" and gets all huffy.
TIP: Stop, drop, and roll.

THE SORROW: Our favorite boss, conceptually. He prefers to let his enemies feel the sorrow of their victims' families. He also cries blood, which is quite icky.
TIP: Wake up.

COLONEL VOLGIN: We just like how he's introduced as "Colonel Volgin—you know him in the West as Thunderbolt." What is he, a racehorse or something?
TIP: Don't shoot him head on.

interesting. No longer content with merely punching and grabbing guys, Snake now does slick grabs, slams, interrogations, and throat slashes. This enhanced move set is easily accomplished with a few presses of the Circle button and the D-pad.

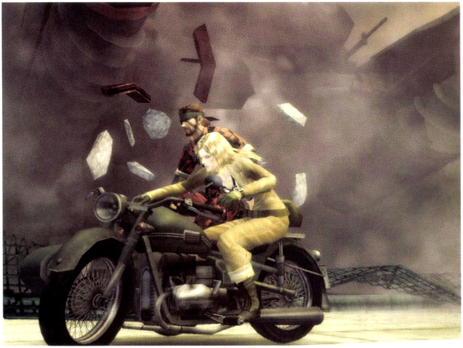
The whole experience takes a good 20 hours or so (17 if you rush it, around 25 or so if you explore every nook) to get through. A base that takes up the last quarter of the game is about as big as half of Big Shell (*MGS2*), and that's after the demo area, some forest, a warehouse, a lab, more forest, a mountain, and even more forest. The other outdoor areas are more flexible and open-ended compared to the demo area and environments in previous games; that is, they are still filled with obvious paths, but there are less-obvious side passages that prove more advantageous (due to secret items or better visibility). These outdoor areas also push the PS2 to its limits—rendering lush foliage and fauna with nary a hiccup (except when it rains, or when you use smoke grenades). A battle in a field of lilies resembles a similar cut-scene in *Final Fantasy VIII*—with the difference that this lily field is all smooth gameplay.

THE END SEQUENCE IS AN UTTERLY ENGROSSING AND VISCERAL RIDE.

Even the cut-scenes have been improved. While many still include stock footage, the cut-scenes, overall, are "directed" better—the characters do more than stand in one place and dispense jibber-jabber. Kojima has also improved on his delivery of exposition a bit—rather than tell everything via codec, a lot of plot is now given in actual cut-scenes. There is still a big dose of verbiage (the ratio of game-to-cinema is about 70/30, I'd say), but at least the talk is more interesting to look at this time.

The cut-scenes are also interactive—to an extent. When you hit R1, you often get an alternate perspective on the cut-scene (for example, when Snake looks through binoculars, hitting R1 shows you what he sees). Usu-

The fight with The Fury is easily one of the best-looking boss battles in PS2 history.



SNAKE VERSUS APE

For those of you wondering what our dear friend Solid Snake has been up to, look no further than the Snake versus Ape minigame. In it, Campbell rouses Snake from a nice vacation in order to partake in Operation: Ape Snake. After the hilarious briefing involving hot girls, other games, and pants, Solid then chooses one of three initial levels (the last two require unlocking). Each level requires you to "tag" and then touch the apes in order to capture them. Each level is something you've played through in *MGS3*

KOJIMA'S FAVORITE FLICKS

While Para-Medic will jabber endlessly after every save segment, at least she won't whine about your relationship (like Rose from *MGS2*) or give you random Chinese proverbs (as does Mei Ling from *MGS*). Instead, she talks about movies she's seen and why she likes them. Even though Snake has never seen these films, Para-Medic talks a great deal about them, and we can't help but think that these are movies that Kojima likes also. Here are some:

Godzilla
The Great Escape
The Blob
The Guns of Navarone
The Magnificent Seven
Jason and the Argonauts
North by Northwest
Dr Strangelove
A Fistful of Dollars
From Russia with Love
Horror of Dracula

ally, this is just a visual gimmick (it's also amusing when Snake first meets Eva, as he just looks at her chest), but occasionally, it shows valuable gameplay information. It can be information that you need later or a vital component that determines who wins a life-or-death battle.

The most noteworthy part of the game is easily the end sequence. Without spoiling it, it's a chase that combines elements of *MGS*, *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, *Return of the Jedi*, *The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker*, and *Ico* into an utterly engrossing and visceral ride. Consider this end sequence Kojima's apology for making people put up with the nonsense of *MGS2's* ending. As good as the rest of the game is, this ending shines by creating a massive, over-the-top, exhilarating ride.

One could easily point to problems, like the camera or the silly dialogue or how the end sequence is mostly a rail-shooter, but the entire package gels together into a cohesive experience. Analytically breaking it down means that *MGS3* is just a very good survival-stealth game coupled with a semihokey story, but taken as a whole, it's easily one of the best experiences on the PS2. « *Thierry Nguyen*

SNAKE: Less nonsensical story, better bosses, better sneaking and fighting, best ending sequence out of all three games
RAIDEN: It's still an *MGS*-style game, so haters of pontificating cutscenes and non–*Splinter Cell* camera systems can keep on hating

Pub. Konami Dev. Konami ESRB M MSRP $49.99

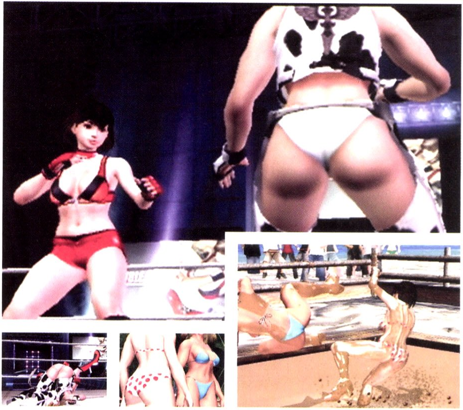
RATING [●●●●●]

REFERENCES TO OTHER MGS GAMES:

Revolver Ocelot (duh)
DARPA Chief Donald Anderson
Psycho Mantis
The Patriots
Wiseman's Committee
Hal Emmerich
Raiden
Les Enfants Terribles project
Solid Snake's sneaking suit
Metal Gear RAY

RUMBLE ROSES

TIME FOR A SHAKEDOWN



From the makers of *WWE SmackDown!* comes *Rumble Roses*—a bouncy, bodacious girl-on-girl grapplefest with hardcore catfights and mud-wrestling mayhem. Gratuitous, over-the-top action in the ring is sandwiched between sequences that are part pageant, part pornographer on a field day with his digital camera. Unfortunately, there is so much eye candy to chew through that even the biggest jiggling-pixel fans out there will soon be impatiently button mashing to get the real match started.

At least the wrestling itself is more than a button-pounding free-for-all. There are plenty of attacks, throws, submission holds, and humiliation tactics to master via the solid control scheme, and you won't last long without perfecting some of them. Your hard work will be rewarded with a camera that uses audacious angles to capture the juiciest bits of action. But it is the exhibition mode's mechanics that add an ounce of depth to a potentially shallow experience, allowing you to set up custom match challenges.

Story mode offers standard fare, skipping character development and focusing more on rivalries via a bizarre backstory about a naughty nurse, Anesthesia. The voice acting and writing are terrible, but honestly, nobody will buy this game for "the articles." Your efforts will unlock various new characters (20 in all) and the all-important alternate bikinis.

Rumble Roses is a visual treat with a solid wrestling engine beneath it, and there is no question for whom this game is meant. I'll admit it's nice to play as a girl instead of watching one prance around the ring for the boys. Unfortunately, the experience bogs down amidst the sex appeal; for a game with such an overage of cleavage, it's ironic that after a couple hours, *Rumble Roses* starts to feel flat. « *Zoe Flower*

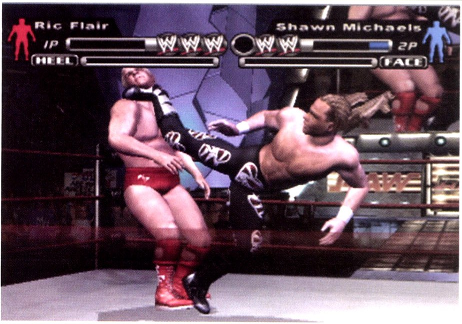
PROS Impressive graphics, easy-to-pick-up controls, smooth gameplay
CONS Long-winded intros/loads, horrific script, limited customization

Pub. Konami **Dev.** Yuke's **ESRB** M **MSRP** $39.99

RATING [●●●○○]

WWE SMACKDOWN! VS. RAW

YEAH, THERE'S SOME PAIN COMING



If you love the WWE, this is your game. If you love pro wrestling...well, then it's going to be a tougher decision. Now that Yuke's has a monopoly on PS2 wrestling, the prospects for evolution in grappling gameplay aren't so bright.

The season mode in *SmackDown! vs. RAW* still destroys any competition. It's an almost seamless simulation of the TV product—the angles are simple, and there are occasional gaps in logic, but at least they don't involve corpses or the birth of plastic hands. While THQ's experiment with spoken dialogue this year fails—the acting is frequently passable, but the mixing and lip-synch are absolutely terrible—what was good in last year's *Here Comes the Pain* is still solid during a season and in the ridiculously versatile wrestler edit mode.

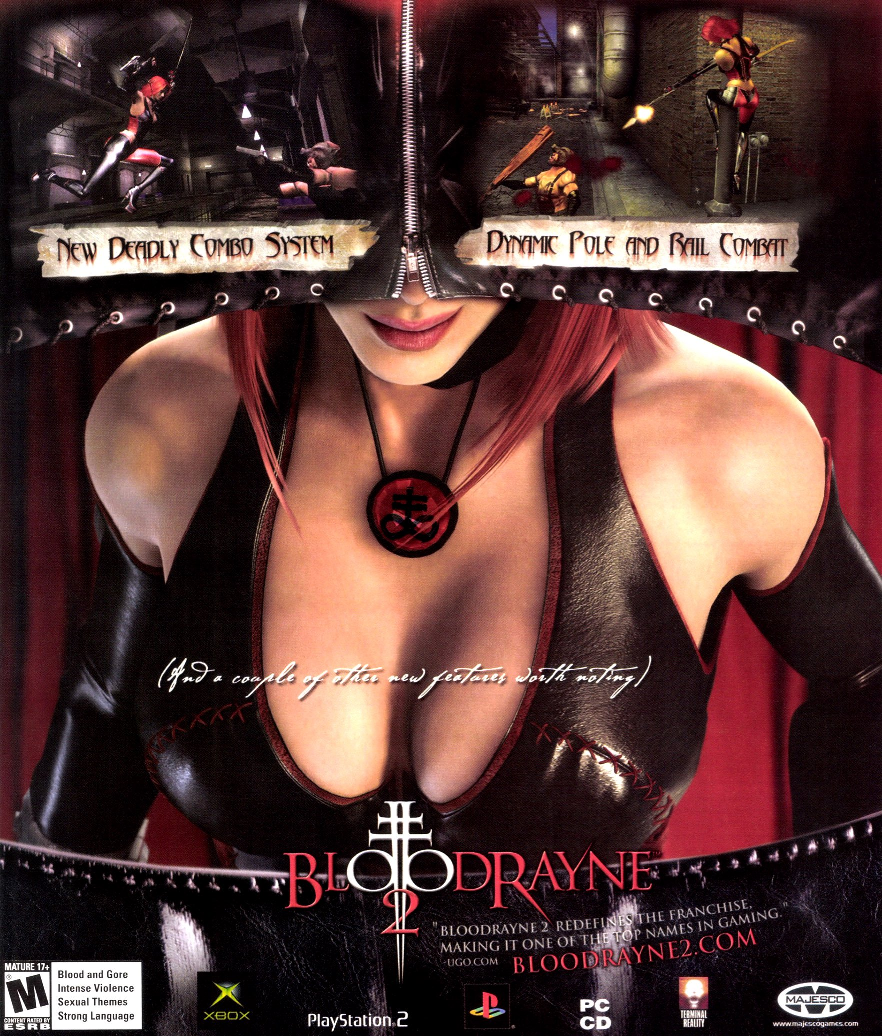
Everything else about *SmackDown!*, though, is wearing out its welcome. In the ring, inconsistencies abound—weird collision detection, neutered submission moves, and A.I. that switches between being timid and simply schizoid. The new *Def Jam* may have had brutally difficult opponents, but at least they were consistently logically challenging. In a Yuke's game, logic sometimes takes the night off.

That takes some of the shine away from a huge selection of match modes and the new addition of online multiplayer (the online mode is pretty bare, only allowing single matches, but it's a step in an interesting direction). Given the absence of any real competition in this genre, it also doesn't inspire a lot of hope for the future. « *Dave Smith*

STIFF SHOTS Season mode hits the mark, and you can design practically anything in the character editor
MISSED SPOTS We still want consistent logical action in the ring
DUSTY FINISH Great simulated fiction, but the guts of it aren't improving

Pub. THQ **Dev.** Yuke's **ESRB** T **MSRP** $49.99

RATING [●●●◐○]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